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April 2009

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WE'VE MADE a few changes to the magazine this month, notably to the Dispatches and World Service sections. The changes are designed to make the most of one of the magazine's greatest strengths, namely our global network of correspondents.

We always strive to ensure that our correspondents live and work in the countries and regions which they report on, or have an intimate knowledge of their particular country. Understanding what makes a country and its football tick is a complex business and can't be done from our offices in London.

So our correspondents continue to be of huge importance to the magazine. That much has not changed.

What has changed is that, each month, they will now be bringing you greater in-depth analysis of their country or region in Dispatches, as well as more detailed league previews and reviews in World Service.

There will also be more reports from correspondents on our website, worldsoccer.com

Please let us know what you think of the changes.

GAVIN HAMILTON, Editor
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...IN PICTURES

The global game caught on camera

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Blue is the colour for CSKA Moscow striker Vagner Love

Lanus defender Maximiliano Velazquez's free-kick worries the Guadalajara wall in the Libertadores Cup

Sulley Muntari of Internazionale gets to grips with Milan's David Beckham in the San Siro derby

There's no masking this Estudiantes fan's excitement before his side's Libertadores Cup match with Universitario de Sucre of Bolivia

Daniel Braaten of Norway attacks Germany's defence

Everton's Jack Rodwell (hidden) scores against Aston Villa in the FA Cup

Thierry Henry celebrates his equaliser for Barcelona in their Champions League tie in Lyon

es' Joe Ledley takes a friendly whack from Poland's Marcin Wasilewski

Sergio Aguero grabs a late winner for Atletico Madrid against Barcelona

Brian Glanville ...on why Tony Adams deserved better at Portsmouth...England's defeat in Seville...Scolari's exit from Chelsea...and the Last of the Mohicans at Arsenal

Let down...Adams' players didn't help his cause at Portsmouth

TEN years ago, Arsene Wenger said of Tony Adams, then Arsenal's captain and centre-half: "I am sure Tony will manage Arsenal some day. I have discussed the future with him and want him to go on playing for as long as possible. Captains and winners like him do not come around very often. But when he decides it is all over as a player, the natural thing would be for him to become manager of Arsenal."

A decade later, Wenger is still the manager of Arsenal, while Adams sits among the ruins of his Portsmouth job, having previously, with scant success, managed Wycombe.

Wenger at that remote time could also see the rest of his ageing but defiant back four going into management. But none of them has. As for Adams, I felt he had a poor deal at Portsmouth and surely deserved better than to be publicly castigated by his keeper, David "Calamity" James. Not least because James' ill-natured strictures came on the back of a typical blunder for England a couple of days earlier, when he fumbled and dropped a deflected shot but got away with it. He doesn't always do so when playing for his country. Remember the fiascos in Vienna and Copenhagen?

Long ago the famous French novelist Andre Gide was asked who he thought was the greatest French poet, to which he trenchantly replied: "Victor Hugo, alas." If one was asked to name the best of England's current keepers, the answer would have to be "David James, alas".

It was said that Adams had lost the Pompey dressing room, but might it have been more relevant to say that the dressing room had lost him? Moreover, what manager could have flourished without two of his finest players, the French midfielder Lassana Diarra, now in fine form with Real Madrid, and Jermaine Defoe, who has returned to Tottenham?

Adams was then abysmally let down by the players who were left. He may hardly be another Wenger, but surely there were extenuating circumstances in his demise.

HOW good or bad are England? Sackcloth and ashes abounded after the recent 2-0 defeat in Seville, but how far was pessimism justified? Surely the fact that arguably three of the best English players of the moment were missing counted for a great deal? Steven Gerrard, Wayne Rooney and Rio Ferdinand are three of the best in the world and quite irreplaceable, as we saw all too clearly from Seville.

That Spain on the night were technically far superior, more inventive and more talented was undeniable, but even then the margin of their victory was only 2-0, and England were unlucky not to score when Carlton Cole exploited an inspired pass from David Beckham (yes, he actually played the whole of the second half in reaching his deeply debatable Bobby Moore-equalling 108 outfield caps), only to have his shot expertly cleared off the line.

Certain English players were plainly not up to snuff. I have never seen Matthew Upson as a centre-back of international quality, though he did have a good game in Berlin after scoring the opening goal. Against

Classy...David Villa's opener for Spain against England

"If one was asked to name the best of England's current keepers, the answer would have to be 'David James, alas'"

Spain, however, he was badly out of position when Fernando Llorente headed the second Spanish goal from a right-flank set piece. As for Phil Jagielka, in his first and probably his last start for England, he was doubly at fault on the first goal, initially fluffing a clearance, then being taken to the cleaners by David Villa on the Spaniard's way to score.

But a substantial consolation was the ebullient form of Shaun Wright-Phillips, rejuvenated since he escaped Chelsea to return to Manchester City. He showed pace and control on both flanks, switching to the left when Beckham arrived, but over and above that he selflessly kept dropping back to help his beleaguered defence.

YOU might say that for Chelsea, relief was at hand when their oligarch owner Roman Abramovich decided to pay off the hapless Luiz Felipe Scolari.

The truth of the matter is that Big Phil simply couldn't adapt to the demands of English club football, whatever his achievements in the past, among which you can hardly count his managership of Portugal, twice humiliated by Greece on their own soil in Euro 2004, and dead lucky to come through on spot kicks against an England World Cup team which lost Rooney to a painful kick.

BEFORE Arsenal's recent frustrating 0-0 home draw against Sunderland, who might well have scored twice through Dean Whitehead in the first half and didn't have a single shot on goal in the second, I found myself talking to Paul Davis, surely the Last of the Mohicans.

That's to say, 20 years or so ago, the last in Arsenal's line of supreme strategists, from the incomparable Alex James (1929-1937), through Jimmy Logie, Jimmy Bloomfield, George Eastham and Liam Brady.

George Graham, a manager who mistrusted the kind of elegant, relaxed player which he used to be himself, eventually left Davis in limbo, but ultimately recalled him, and the midfielder played a crucial part in two Wembley Cup Finals.

With Denilson and Alexandre Song in central midfield against Sunderland, whose Hungarian goalkeeper Marton Fulop was superbly defiant, Arsenal simply hadn't the invention to break through the visitors' massed defence, though the Wearsiders' recently appointed manager Ricky Sbragia honestly admitted that the Gunners might have scored four or five times.

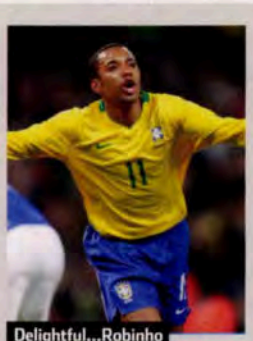
One consolation for Arsenal, and their highly appreciative fans, was the form of Russia's little Andrei Arshavin on his Premier League debut. Though, as Wenger emphasised afterwards, he was far from match fit after many weeks of inactivity, he provided the grace notes in the Gunners' first-half performance: assured, technically adroit, intelligent, twice going near to a goal.

We can, I think, write off his poor performance in the European Championship semi-final last year, remembering instead the two dazzling displays he gave in the two previous rounds, and the way in which he magnificently took apart the Rangers defence in Manchester, playing for his club side, Zenit, in last season's UEFA Cup Final. ●

Arsenal maestro...Davis

SIX GOALS
WE'D LIKE TO SEE AGAIN...

1 Robinho, Brazil v Italy
Dispossessed a defender, then danced through the defence


Delightful...Robinho

2 Eliran Atar, Bnei Yehuda v Maccabi Netanya
Breathtaking bicycle kick

Stunning...Lojero

3 Victor Lojero, San Luis v Cruz Azul
Control, turn and volley from edge of the area

4 Kevin Kuranyi, Schalke v Borussia Dortmund
Spectacular overhead volley

5 Zoltan Hercegfalvi, Honved v Vasas
Backheeled deflected pass into net without breaking stride

Smashing...Vucinic

6 Mirko Vucinic, Roma v Genoa
Lashed volley on the run following team move from own half

Quality...Kuranyi

To see clips of these goals, visit www.worldsoccer.com

NUMBERS GAME

20,000
season tickets sold by new MLS team Seattle Sounders

875
euros paid by former Formula One champion and Koln fan Michael Schumacher to help finance the return of Lukas Podolski to the club

16
coaching changes made by Argentinian side Racing Club in the past 10 years following the sacking of Juan Manuel Llop and the appointment of new boss Ricardo Caruso Lombardi

£7.5m
Luiz Felipe Scolari's pay-off from Chelsea

30,164
seats at Hoffenheim's new stadium, the Rhein-Neckar Arena

301
Bundesliga games played for Borussia Dortmund by Lars Ricken, 32, who announced his retirement after 15 years with the club

16
league games in charge of Portsmouth for Tony Adams before he was sacked

5
years that away fans will be banned from all matches between Ajax and Feyenoord

REPORTS

WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

Lighting the way...Father Berbatov

● GREAT UNCLE BULGARIA

Father Stoyan Berbatov, priest and uncle of Manchester United star Dimitar Berbatov, is gaining an increasing following for his exorcism ceremonies in Bulgaria. Stoyan puts the popularity of his church, the Archangel of Saint Michael in Blagoevgrad, down to his nephew's global fame.

"I have been in this parish for over 15 years and the congregation used to be small," he says. "But now Bulgaria is football mad. It has a celebrity in the best team in the world. And now my church is full."

● HENRIK FLOORS 'EM

Henrik Larsson is expected to play one more season for Helsingborgs when the new Swedish season starts in April. In the meantime, he surprised everybody by turning out for Helsingborgs' floorball team. For those not familiar with the Swedish sport, it is reminiscent of ice hockey but without the ice, skates and tackles, and played with carbon sticks and a plastic ball. Larsson made his debut on live TV in November but after seven games he had only scored once.

Stick man...Henrik Larsson

RUMOURS

WE'D LIKE TO BELIEVE

● JUVENTUS directors took advantage of the recent Champions League trip to London to dine with Chelsea midfielder Deco and his agent Jorge Mendes (*Gazzetta dello Sport*).

● ARSENAL are one of several big-name clubs chasing Wolfsburg's promising Bosnia striker Edin Dzeko (*Kicker*).

● FORMER Arsenal favourite Mathieu Flamini has found starts hard to come by at Milan, so Napoli may bring in the France midfielder on loan (*Il Mattino*).

● BARCELONA goalkeeper Victor Valdes could be on his way to Milan (*Marca*), as could striker Samuel Eto'o, whose agent has been in preliminary talks (*Gazzetta dello Sport*).

● BARCELONA are interested in Athletic Bilbao and Spain forward Fernando Llorente (*Sport*).

Heading for Milan?...Eto'o

● CAMEROON midfielder Stephane Mbia of Rennes is moving to the Premier League (*France Football*).

HEROES

ACHILLE EMANA

Real Betis fans set great store by the Cameroon midfielder's work rate and goals, while back home he is involved with a charity to help abandoned children.

THE FRENCH FEDERATION

For turning down a request from ex-Olympique Marseille players to have their 1992-93 League title restored. OM were stripped of the crown for match-fixing and the passing of time does not make the offence any less acceptable.

IVAN DE LA PENA

The Barcelona old boy scored twice to steer Espanyol to victory in the Catalan derby – the latter's first win at Camp Nou for 27 years.

VILLAINS

JULEN LOPETEGUI

For the fourth time this season the coach of Real Madrid B side, Castilla, was ordered from the dugout.

HARRY REDKNAPP AND MARTIN O'NEILL

If the Tottenham and Aston Villa managers think it's fine to field seriously understrength sides in the UEFA Cup, they should have pulled out at the start of the season and given another Premier League club a chance.

JENS LEHMANN

Stuttgart's veteran keeper is still a candidate for a course of anger management. Annoyed by team-mate Khalid Boulahrouz during a UEFA Cup tie with Zenit he ripped off the latter's headband.

Priorities...O'Neill and Redknapp

Paul Gardner

The good, the bad and the IFAB

THINGS ARE improving on the rule-making front. This is the time of year when we hear of the latest decisions from the International Football Association Board, the committee that decides on such matters. And usually the news is depressing. Sometimes the IFAB digs its heels in and adheres to a questionable status quo; at others it limits itself to word-shuffling for the sake of clarification. Or we get changes that do more harm than good.

This year we got a bit of each, as usual, but we also got an immensely encouraging decision. I refer to IFAB's forthright rejection of sin bins. IFAB gave no explanation for its decision – a pity, because it would be interesting to hear, but I'll live without it.

I've had my say on sin bins before, in this column back in November 2004. I do regard the idea of sin bins in soccer as both absurd and pernicious. Good riddance to them, though I suspect they'll be back; they seem to crop up in five-year cycles.

Also happily rejected was the notion to stretch the half-time break from 15 to 20 minutes. Some people interpreted that as a sly way of creating more time for television ads – I certainly did – so I'm glad to see the back of that too.

Offside chaos

Next, we got a rewording of the Interpretation of Rule 11, the offside rule. I'm less happy with this, but maybe it has to be accepted as making the best of an almost impossible situation. Some sort of revision was certainly necessary after the chaos that surrounded Ruud Van Nistelrooy's goal for Holland against Italy in Euro 2008.

By any reasonable standards, Van Nistelrooy was clearly offside. But the goal was allowed because Italy defender Christian Panucci had left the field, passing over the goal line without the referee's permission, and was therefore considered to be still on the field, so keeping Van Nistelroy onside.

Contentious...an offside Van Nistelrooy scores against Italy at Euro 2008

"A new wording justifies the ref's decision to allow Van Nistelrooy's goal"

Of course Panucci had left the field – but involuntarily. He was barged over the line during a certainly uninvited collision with his own goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon. Praise was heaped on referee Peter Frojdfeldt (mostly by other referees) for allowing the goal. But it quickly turned out that the interpretation under which he acted was questionable, to say the least, because, as UEFA general secretary David Taylor had to admit, the offside rule "does not deal with this situation directly at all". Nor even indirectly, I would say.

Now we have new wording that, in retrospect, justifies Frojdfeldt's decision. We are told that any player who leaves the field "for any reason without the referee's permission" is considered to be still on the field. Simplifying the referee's already difficult job is a worthy aim and I suppose this makes the best of an impossible situation. While I don't like the ruling, I simply cannot see a workable alternative.

And so to a change that does more harm than good. In future, coaches will be allowed to stand up permanently and prowl about in the technical area. In the past they were allowed to walk to the edge of the area to shout their instructions, but were supposed to return to the bench immediately. Obviously they haven't been doing that, so IFAB has taken the easy way out and, "to avoid unnecessary conflicts between fourth officials and coaches", the coach (just one) will be allowed to remain on his feet in the area, provided he behaves "in a responsible manner". That could almost be a sly joke, but I think not as IFAB has never been famous for its sense of humour.

There was once a happy era when the rules absolutely, flatly, forbade any coaching from the sidelines. An era that lasted for 127 years, during which the game somehow managed to survive quite nicely. That ban was subtly undermined in 1990 – not by a rule change, but by a FIFA memorandum to the World Cup referees stating that coaching during the game was permissible but "only from the team's bench".

I don't like the change for a number of reasons. Firstly, because IFAB is giving way to the coaches – just as it did with the original change. The coaches ignore the rules and IFAB, rather than insisting that they obey them, backs off and modifies the rules to allow the coaches to do what they like. Secondly, we've now had over 15 years of legal sideline coaching. And what has it done for the game? Anyone care to answer that on a positive note?

The most obvious result of the rule change has been to increase the coach's visibility and importance. The behaviour of coaches within (and, not infrequently, outside) their technical areas is often anything but responsible. Sometimes it is downright obnoxious. And television is there to make sure we don't miss the antics. ●

Jim Holden

Who doubts Beckham now?

DAVID BECKHAM has been confronted by a sceptical world from the moment he won a regular place in the Manchester United team as an ambitious teenager in August 1995 – and he has always found a way to prove people wrong.

So, my question is simple: why does anyone still doubt him now?

Wherever he had ended up playing his club football for the next 15 months – be it Italy, America, England or some as yet undiscovered soccer wilderness – rest assured Beckham would still be parading on centre stage at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

You cannot keep the man down. You cannot deny his endless capacity for reinvention. You cannot neglect the plain fact that he creates and scores goals that matter in significant matches.

Many observers have been astounded that Beckham was drafted into Milan's first team almost as soon as he turned up on loan from Los Angeles Galaxy, ostensibly to keep himself fit for selection for the England team. The real surprise is that anyone was surprised.

Beckham has always been too good to leave on the bench for a manager in need of results.

I happened to be there back in 1995 when he was introduced as a half-time substitute with Manchester United already losing 3-0 away to Aston Villa on the opening day of the league season. He skipped on to the pitch anonymously and proceeded to dominate the ensuing 45 minutes, demanding the ball at every opportunity, using it wisely, and scoring with a serving, dipping long-range shot that would become his trademark.

That evening, famously, the TV pundit Alan Hansen told viewers that "you win nothing with kids" and barely made mention of Beckham's striking individual performance.

Hansen was hopelessly mistaken. Manchester United did win the Premier League title that season and, what do you know, they did win it with the kids.

Cynics swiftly enough denigrated Beckham for being too slow. They wondered what kind of winger it was who couldn't beat his full-back. But the kid had a quick mind and he had the devastating talent to whip a pinpoint cross round defenders without the need to zip past them.

Marriage to a girl-band star catapulted Beckham into fever pitch of the modern, celebrity-obsessed world. It appalled the critics, but the player had the charm, wit and dedication to his craft to succeed despite the furies of fame that shackled other sportsmen tempted by glitz.

Oh, and never forget that his global recognition earned far more money for his shirt-selling clubs than it did for him. That was true at both Manchester United and Real Madrid, where he proved another doubting manager wrong by winning back his place in a first team ruled by the iron fist of Fabio Capello.

Staying put...Beckham

"You cannot keep the man down. You cannot deny his endless capacity for reinvention or that he scores and creates goals that matter"

Triumph of character

That was a triumph of character as well as football talent, and Beckham played a serious role in helping Real win the Spanish title.

This is not to say that Beckham hasn't made mistakes, that he doesn't have flaws which have kept him one rung below the very best players of his generation. And it is clear that he now regrets the decision to join LA Galaxy for the most gargantuan pay deal in football history when it seemed as if his England career was over after he was dropped by then-manager Steve McClaren.

Critics scorned the move, and they were correct. Yet Beckham somehow proved us all wrong again by showing it wasn't the end of the line. McClaren had to recall him to the national side because the young English replacements simply weren't good enough – Theo Walcott the one exception. When Capello took over the England reins he remembered the character shown by Beckham and made a policy decision that the player's experience would be valuable all the way to South Africa.

So, too, would his free-kicks and capacity to create goals with sublime crosses and raking forward passes.

Capello helped to engineer the original winter loan move from Galaxy to Milan, and again the sceptics scoffed. Beckham merely performed his usual trick and immediately won a first-team place on merit.

What else could it be? Who on earth believes they pick players on sentiment at the San Siro? Under the terms of the new "agreement" between Milan and Galaxy, Beckham will not go back to the US until July, returning to play in Serie A again in November for a further eight months.

Conventional wisdom reckons that playing in Europe is important, that it matters hugely to Beckham's hopes of being involved at the 2010 World Cup. Personally, I doubt it. The past 18 months have proved that his talent and ambition remain vivid, and that his capacity for renewal is as strong as it ever was.

Barring injury or an unlikely calamity for England in their qualifying group, Beckham will be there in South Africa.

And while some critics remain fiercely and implacably hostile, the fact is that during England matches at Wembley the biggest cheer from the ordinary supporter is always reserved for David Beckham. ●

FROM THE FRINGES

Chagos chase the dream

MOST EXPAT teams have strong links with their roots, but Chagos Island FC are not like any other team. "The parents or grandparents of all our players come from there," says manager Jamie Chennen, whose team are unlikely to ever return to the islands forming part of the British Indian Ocean Territory.

Between 1967 and 1971, the BIOT's population was forcibly removed by the UK government to make way for a US military base and 2,000 Chagossians were dumped on Mauritius and the Seychelles. They have since won court actions in the UK for a return but these have been ignored by the government, whose only concession was to allow them to settle in Britain a few years ago.

Around 2,000 Chagossians from Mauritius now live in London and around Gatwick Airport, where many work. Chennen said: "I met all the guys playing on a field in Crawley and in August 2007 we decided to form a proper team and see how far we could take it." Last summer, they joined Division Two of the Crawley & District League and won their first eight matches. "We've done well, but most of the players work at the airport and we can't get all of them all the time," said Chennen, who has augmented his squad with the odd Pole and South African.

Some of the 25-strong squad played as semi-professionals in the Mauritian first and second divisions before moving to the UK. Johny Edmond, a Mauritius international of Chagossian descent, has also coached Chennen's team.

A visit to this summer's Viva World Cup for Non-FIFA Nations in Italy is unlikely to happen, though. Georges Wuethrich, a Swiss IT consultant married to a Chagossian, and who sits on the Non-FIFA board as the Islanders' representative, says: "Some players have only been in the UK for a year and are not really working so it's hard for them to go away. If all goes well, maybe we can go to next year's World Cup on Gozo."

Steve Menary

BLATTERWATCH

FIFA president Sepp Blatter could breathe a sigh of relief after he received only the minimum fine of 600 Swiss francs (£360) for his part in a high-speed crash in which he lost control of his Mercedes sports car. The verdict surprised many in Switzerland, where fines are supposed to reflect a person's ability to pay – suggesting that the court may not have been aware of Blatter's true income.

Banked up...Blatter's Mercedes after the crash

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12 STORIES YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

UNITED STATES
MLS kicks off

The 14th season of Major League Soccer gets under way this month – without David Beckham. More, pages 22 and 99.

NORTHERN IRELAND
IFAB decisions

The International Football Association Board, the game's rule-making body opted to extend its experiments with additional match officials to a whole league championship from next season. More, page 13.

VENEZUELA
Brazil youth finish on top

Brazil will head to the World Youth Cup in Egypt later this year as favourites after they won a 10th South American Under-20 title. More, page 95

MEXICO
Svent force?

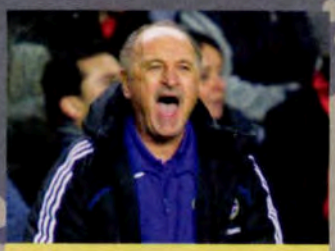
National coach Sven Goran Eriksson is under increasing pressure after another defeat by the United States. More, page 42.

ARGENTINA
River return

River Plate, boosted by new signing Cristian "Ogre" Fabbiani, made the early running in the 2009 closing championship. More, page 35.

NIGERIA
Adebayor's African accolade

Arsenal striker Emmanuel Adebayor received his CAF African Player of the Year award at a ceremony in Lagos.



ENGLAND
Scolari sacked

Luiz Felipe's brief reign as Chelsea coach ended when his contract was terminated by impatient owner Roman Abramovich, who appointed Guus Hiddink as a temporary replacement. More, page 16.

CHINA
Bird's Nest selected

The Beijing Olympic stadium will host next season's Italian Supercup match between the Serie A champions and the Coppa Italia winners.

ITALY
Inter's derby triumph

Internazionale are seven points clear in Serie A after victory over Milan in the city's derby match.

SPAIN
Record-breaker Raul Gonzalez

Real Madrid's captain Raul set a new club record when he scored his 308th goal, overtaking the previous mark set by Alfredo Di Stefano. More, page 17.

SAUDI ARABIA
Saudi setback

Jose Peseiro is the country's new coach after Nasser Al Johar quit following a shock defeat by North Korea in the World Cup qualifiers. More, page 94

AUSTRALIA
Melbourne's victory

The champions retained their A-League title after beating Adelaide in the Grand Final. More, page 90.

HEADLINERS

People in the news...on and off the pitch

Guus Hiddink

From 'Super Farmer' to Chelsea cosmopolitan

ENGLAND

IT WASN'T until the 2002 World Cup finals that Chelsea's new temporary coach Guus Hiddink eventually won over the sceptics in his homeland. It wasn't as if his track record was in doubt; after all, he had led PSV Eindhoven to the 1988 European Cup and won the Intercontinental Cup (now called the Club World Cup) as coach of Real Madrid 10 years later. Somehow he just wasn't given the full credit for his achievements at club level.

For many, PSV's European triumph was down to influential veterans Soren Lerby, Ronald Koeman and Eric Gerets. The man who managed was all too often described in the media as "Guus Geluk", which means "Lucky Guus" and is also the Dutch name for the nephew of Walt Disney's Donald Duck who always has luck on his side.

Critics pan his early exit at Real Madrid in February 1999 and anonymous years in charge at Fenerbahce, Valencia and Real Betis. Then there was the disastrous 1996 European Championship, where the only headlines Holland made were about Edgar Davids' exit after a clash with Hiddink.

When the success dried up, he was always reminded of his modest playing career at second division De Graafschap and PSV, where he was never a key player and left after a year and a half. He was labelled lazy, someone who preferred to go out for a ride on his Harley in the Achterhoek region of rural Holland and who enjoyed life to the max.

Although 2002 changed his countrymen's perceptions, that recognition maybe should have come at the World Cup four years earlier. If the weak referee Ali Bujsaim from the United Arab Emirates had given Holland the penalty they deserved when Pierre Van Hooijdonk was brought down in the last minute of the 1998 World Cup semi-final against Brazil, Hiddink, rather than Aime Jacquet, might have been coach of the new world champions.

But four years later, when he took South Korea to the semi-finals, public opinion of Hiddink changed. It was as if everybody opened their eyes and realised he wasn't just one of the "Super Farmers" (the nickname of De Graafschap) and the son of a headmaster from rural Varsseveld. Hiddink had turned into a clever coach, a man of the people with a cosmopolitan aura. He was seen as one who could open doors for trade or diplomatic missions.

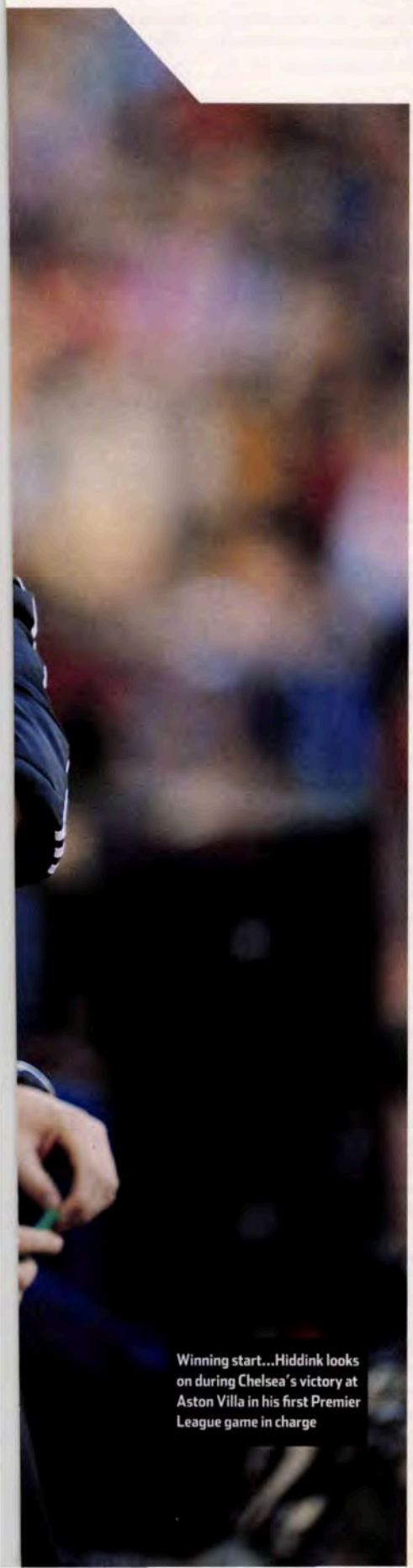
Hiddink's key elements are convincing players of their responsibilities and creating the right atmosphere for success. As a result, mediocre teams such as South Korea and Australia rose above themselves, while in Russia he told players wearing the national shirt is not an obligation but an honour.

"Guus' biggest quality is getting the best out of people he is working with," says his former assistant and current Schalke coach, Fred Rutten. "He always looks at the bigger picture. He is interested in the players' private lives and therefore knows exactly how to deal with specific situations. Different cultures need different approaches and he is aware of that."

But there is more to Hiddink. "He is a strategist who can turn a match with one or two substitutions or tactical decisions," claims former team-mate and current De Graafschap chairman Sietze Veen. "He wins matches by insight. That makes him one of the best coaches in the world."

Hiddink, who remains in charge of Russia's national team while coaching Chelsea until the end of the season, has said he plans to retire after the 2010 World Cup. Before then, Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich is hoping his close friend can restore much-needed confidence at Stamford Bridge.

Klaas-Jan Droppert



Winning start...Hiddink looks on during Chelsea's victory at Aston Villa in his first Premier League game in charge

It's all mine...Raul celebrates his record-breaking goal at Sporting Gijon

Raul

Real Madrid striker breaks Di Stefano's club record

SPAIN

JORGE VALDANO once insisted that while some people dream of getting a mention in the *Guinness Book of Records*, Raul Gonzalez would end up having an entire chapter dedicated just to him.

Already the all-time leading scorer in Europe's premier club competition, and the man who has got more goals for Spain than anyone else, he now has another record to call his own. Thanks to a typically clinical finish at Sporting Gijon, Raul has become Real Madrid's record goalscorer.

His opening goal in a 4-0 stroll – he added a second 14 minutes from time – was his 308th for the club, taking him past Alfredo Di Stefano, who many Spaniards consider the greatest of all time.

When Raul scored two more against Real Betis at the Bernabeu, he altered his celebration. Instead of pointing at his name in vindication of his own success and in the face of the critics, he pointed to the fans, dedicating the strike to them.

It has taken Raul 685 matches to overtake a total Di Stefano reached in 396, but it remains an incredible feat. Surviving so long at the Bernabeu is no easy thing.

Significantly, Raul, at 31, has come back from what looked like a premature end to his career. He may have lost the dashing near-post runs, the impeccable first touch. But he has re-found his goalscoring form –not 20 a season but a respectable return when for a long time it was not.

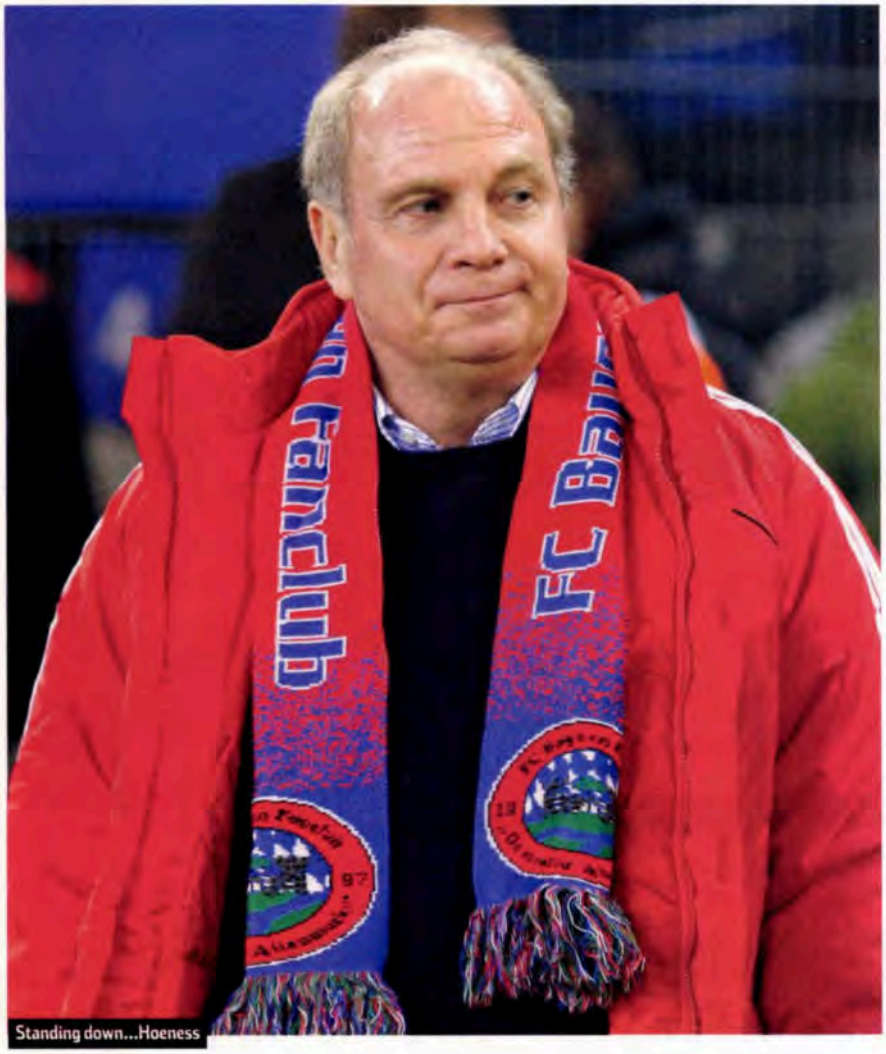
Raul went four seasons without beating 11 league goals, three without getting into double figures. A knee injury made it seem even more likely that he would never fully return. And, of course, he lost his place in the national squad, even though last season, with Ruud Van Nistelrooy injured, he stepped up to the plate and scored 18 league goals, his best total for seven years.

But if anyone thought the national side's success without him would finally lay the "Raul for Spain" crusade to bed they were wrong. If anyone thought last season's haul was his last hurrah they were equally mistaken. This season he has continued to give his cheerleaders ammunition.

Raul says, rather unconvincingly: "I will look back on the records fondly when I have retired, but right now they do not mean anything."

And with Madrid's captain insisting he will play on until at least 2011, when he might embark on an American adventure, there could yet be two more landmarks for Raul: all-time top marksman in the European Cup and La Liga's all-time highest scorer. Get both of those and Valdano might just be proved right.

Sid Lowe



Standing down...Hoeness

Uli Hoeness
Bayern's power-broker

GERMANY

THINK BAYERN MUNICH and one name leaps to mind: Franz Beckenbauer. *Der Kaiser* captained the club to a European Champions Cup hat-trick in the 1970s, wrought a tactical revolution as an attacking sweeper and led West Germany to World Cup glory in 1974. He then went on to be a winner as a coach at national and club level, before overseeing further Bayern success as club president.

But there is another man who has, perhaps, been even more instrumental in Bayern's domination of German club football over the past 30 years.

This summer Uli Hoeness will stand down as the club's general manager after nearly 30 years service – during which time he has hired and fired some of the greatest coaches, bought and sold some of the finest players, argued with the game's most powerful officials, and given the media a string of headline-grabbing stories.

"We will miss him as general manager," says Beckenbauer. "Uli has been a rock for this club. He has tied together all the strings, from the directors to the coaching staff to the players. He has been our anchor, our fulcrum. He will be a tough act to follow."

That is precisely the reason some of the obvious candidates have backed away from speculation linking them with the role. The latest was Oliver Kahn, Bayern's idiosyncratic goalkeeper and captain for 10 years, and thus an important link in the Hoeness chain of command.

Kahn, as independent and mentally defiant as Hoeness, says: "My commitments over the next year or so mean I would not have the time for the job. In any case, to follow Uli Hoeness is a big job, the biggest in German football. You don't go there easily."

Klaus Allofs, a footballing contemporary of Hoeness, could be the man. Twice the Bundesliga's top scorer and a former Germany international striker like Hoeness, Allofs is general manager at Werder Bremen, where he has worked carefully and cleverly to keep the modest northern club at the forefront of German football achievement and influence. But Allofs has worked within a tight budget. Could be handle the far more expansive financial levers available at Bayern? Could he cope with the far more egotistical superstars on the club's payroll?

Bayern is a remarkable club and boasts regional pride on behalf of Bavaria in southern Germany in the same way Barcelona flies the flag for Catalonia in Spain, Marseille for the south of France and Milan in northern Italy. It also boasts more money – through fans' support, sponsorship and television investment – than all the rest of the Bundesliga put together.

It takes a remarkable man to pull all the strings simultaneously. But then Hoeness came to the job from a remarkable background.

Amateur status

Born in the Danube town of Ulm on January 5, 1952, Hoeness built an impressive teenage career and was captain of West Germany's Under-15s. At 18 he joined Bayern, but continued his studies to qualify as a teacher and kept his amateur status so he could play for his country at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games.

Capped at full international level before the Munich Games, he was a member of the team which beat England 3-1 at Wembley – the first German win in the "temple" of football – on the way to triumph in the 1972 European Championship. Two years later – along with Beckenbauer and other club-mates such as goalkeeper Sepp Maier, defenders Hans-Georg Schwarzenbeck and Paul Breitner, and marksman Gerd Muller – he won the Champions Cup with Bayern and the World Cup with West Germany.

Hoeness was still only 22 but, without realising it, he had reached the peak of his career. In 1975 he suffered a serious knee injury in a Champions Cup Final against Leeds; in 1976 he missed the decisive penalty as West Germany lost the European Championship Final against Czechoslovakia; in 1978 he left Bayern for Nurnberg; and less than a year later, still only 27, he was forced to retire.

Hoeness returned to Bayern as general manager and turned an undefined role into a power base of far-reaching proportions. His business intuition saw him negotiate sponsorships with Adidas and truck company Magirus-Deutz to wipe out Bayern's debt and lay the financial foundations for the club's long and lucrative future.

Hoeness also used his personal rewards wisely. The son of a small-town butcher, he set up a sausage factory to secure his family's future and reinvested the profits in one of the country's fastest-growing supermarket chains.

He was blessed in a more fundamental way as well. In 1982 he set off from Hannover to fly to Munich in a private plane with three friends. The plane crashed and Hoeness was the only survivor. He escaped, virtually unscathed, because he had gone to sleep in the back of the aircraft. To this day he remembers nothing of the tragedy.

It was Hoeness who negotiated the return to the club – first as director, then president – of Beckenbauer. With Beckenbauer came kudos, greater respect and a level of influence previously beyond Bayern. He also ensured the club both balanced the books but also signed the finest players available from the rest of Germany.

He spoke out aggressively to ensure the Bundesliga earned as much as possible from its television deals and he put Bayern four-square behind the G-14 group of elite clubs – which frightened UEFA into creating the elite-serving Champions League.

From a position of power Hoeness could virtually say what he liked about opposing players, about referees, about officials, even about rival coaches.

He has always justified his outbursts by insisting that, in attracting controversy, he managed to keep media pressure away from his own players and whoever happened to be coach at the time – from Pal Csernai to Jurgen Klinsmann.

All have been Hoeness appointees. But the question now is how will he replace himself?

Keir Radnedge

Mohamed Aboutraika
A player who's aware of his responsibilities

EGYPT

MOHAMED ABOUTRAIKA is a rare Egyptian footballer indeed. While the likes of Mido and Amr Zaki are making headlines, for better or worse, in the English Premier League, it's remarkable to find that their elder and better has stayed loyal to his roots.

But then Al Ahly's 30-year-old is not your usual footballer, even beyond the fact he has remained faithful to his roots since he launched his career as a teenager with local minnows Tersana and grabbed the goals which would fire them up into the top division. Simultaneously, he graduated from Cairo University with a bachelor of arts degree and then set about rewriting the history of Egyptian football after transferring to Al Ahly in 2004.

In one of his first games he endeared himself to his new fans by scoring a goal against local rivals Zamalek and was quickly promoted to the national squad. He scored the winning penalty in the shoot-out against Ivory Coast in the 2006 African Nations Cup Final and the winner again against Ghana in the 2008 Final.

His heroes were Mahmoud El Khatib nationally and Zinedine Zidane internationally, and his list of prizes includes three African Champions League crowns and four Egyptian league titles. He was the BBC African Player of the Year last year, as well as finishing second behind Arsenal's Emmanuel Adebayor in CAF's 2008 award, and he was also voted Arab Footballer of the Year by the Abu Dhabi-based magazine *Super*.

Not that his career has been controversy-free. Internet giant Google came under pressure to remove his name from its search results after he celebrated an African Nations Cup goal against Sudan in 2008 by pulling his shirt up over his face to reveal a T-shirt with the slogan "Sympathize with Gaza".

An explanation may be found in the way he views his talent for the game. He says: "I love soccer – it's everything, my world. God gave me this blessing and I want to use it the best I can to benefit everyone. For that you need to stay humble and not become conceited and always remember to thank God for everything you have."

Egypt have acquired a tradition for punching below their weight in World Cup terms and therefore it seems his reputation will always rest on his achievements with Al Ahly – a link of which he is enormously proud.

"Being part of a big club like Al Ahly means you're a top player but that also means that, when you play for them, you need to bring the fans the reward of a league or a cup," says Aboutraika.

"But we're not just a bunch of people who play a game and that's it. We try to serve as role models and leaders for the younger generation to find their passion, their joy and follow their dreams.

" It only takes something small to make you big. I started off small."

Keir Radnedge

Loyalty...Aboutraika is not your average footballer

Keir Radnedge

Drugs bust

Football cannot afford to mess with WADA

Getting the message across...WADA president John Fahey (left) and director general David Howman

MICHEL PLATINI must think again if he expects the World Anti-Doping Agency to run for cover and exempt football from its contentious "whereabouts" regulations.

Not even the most ruthless of East German sports scientists nor the cleverest BALCO chemist could come up with a drug to make a footballer pass the ball more accurately, shoot with more control and venom, or read a game more perceptively and react more intelligently.

But certain so-called "social drugs" rank among stimulants and, as the Juventus scandal demonstrated, a myriad of concoctions exist to aid muscle development to the point where any observer – in Juventus' case, famously, Zdenek Zeman – cannot resist pointing out the obvious.

Evidence to arouse suspicion is out there for all to see among athletes of other sports which have been not only tardy in signing up to the WADA code but moaned and groaned about it.

Surely, anyone who complains must know the inference of their resistance? Hence it was disappointing to see reports of Platini's upset at football having to fall in line with WADA's admittedly invasive demands.

David Howman, the New Zealander who is director general of WADA, has hinted that for whatever reason – ever the lawyer, he refuses to stray beyond his brief and enter the realms of speculation – some sports' national associations have not done enough to engage with their players in the anti-doping debate.

In football's case that is partly the fault of FIFA, which delayed so long over signing up to WADA, and, even then, had to be dragged kicking and screaming to the table to fall in line with every other Olympic sport.

Any and every major sport needs to be WADA-friendly. Standing aloof is not an option. Staying out in the cold – however you dress it up – says your sport has something to hide, the secret that "dare not speak its name".

WADA is not some random, self-serving, secret police. Its status lies in its "ownership": half by sport and half by governments – more than 100 of which have now ratified WADA's UNESCO convention. The penalty for staying outside is being debarred from hosting international events – be it the World Cup, Olympic Games or sport-specific championships.

Refined regime

WADA is 10 years old and, over the past two, has worked intensively to spread its tentacles and refine its deterrence system so that the real cheats are punished effectively and consistently, while accidental infringements are acknowledged far more leniently.

So far, so good. However, from January this year WADA introduced a more demanding code with a "whereabouts" regime which is at the heart of the latest burgeoning row with football.

WADA insists all sports fall into line with a refined regime which means that the nominated stars keep national testers informed of their whereabouts between "only" 6am and 11pm, albeit still seven days a week, 365 days a year.

This is what aroused the ire of the English players' union (among others) and prompted threats of legal action over supposed human rights breaches from groups of athletes and players in France and Belgium.

Howman and WADA's Australian president John Fahey have made it very clear the "whereabouts" regime

> **"I don't see how you can have an effective test if you can't find the athlete"**
>
> *WADA president John Fahey*

Read more from Keir Radnedge at worldsoccer.com

will not be put on ice. The most they will offer is a review next year – and then only of the implementation system, not the concept.

If pampered, out-of-the-real-world superstars are too deeply engrossed with their PlayStations, the "whereabouts" information can be provided by their agents or personal managers.

Howman says: "We will always listen to appropriate criticism and suggestions but we can't change the standard on the basis of complaints via the media. We are pragmatists."

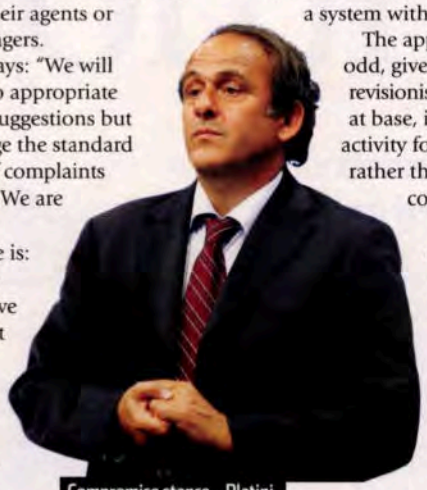
Fahey's line is: "How can you have an effective test if you can't find the athlete? Surely it's more appropriate to monitor this and, if shortfalls emerge, then we'll look at it again. But it's a bit silly to say it's time to change after only eight weeks."

Footballers can forget being allowed a three-week holiday break – a Platini compromise offer. Fahey said: "I can't see how you can apply the code only for a certain time of the year if you want a system with integrity."

The apparent stand-off is odd, given Platini''s revisionist stance that football, at base, is a recreational activity for the greater good rather than a just a commercial cash cow.

Fahey sees doping as a threat to public health and says: "We must destroy the message that it's OK to cheat."

Surely he and Platini are singing from the same hymn sheet? ●


Compromise stance...Platini

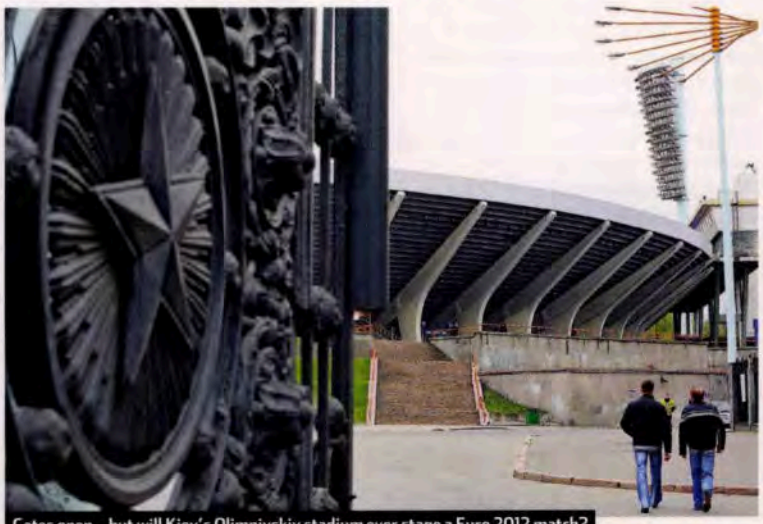
Ukraine deadline looming

IF EVER THERE were an example of why co-hosting is such a poor idea you need look only at the continuing confusion over the projected staging of Euro 2012 in Poland and Ukraine.

The global economic crisis has cast not only renewed doubts about the proposed new stadium in Kiev but also political and financial stability in Ukraine after the ongoing dispute over Russian gas supplies. Now the Poles suggest they might "come to the rescue" by providing six of the eight stadia.

UEFA president Michel Platini (who, one assumes, never wanted Euro 2012 to head east anyway) has done reverse somersaults, never mind bent over backwards, to give Warsaw and Kiev more time than he should to get their virtual projected houses in order. May is the next deadline but anyone can see the fearsome nature of the infrastructural challenge has been exacerbated by the ever-deepening recession.

UEFA really should put everyone out of their misery. And, while its executive is confronting co-hosting, find some means to pull Portugal out of the compromised joint World Cup bid with Spain.


Gates open...but will Kiev's Olimpiyskiy stadium ever stage a Euro 2012 match?

FINANCIAL
FOOTBALL
TV cash blow for Africa

Going live...but Ghana fans' cheers have been cut short

Television screens across the continent have gone blank following the collapse of GTV

THE OHENE DJAN Stadium in central Accra, home to Ghana's Hearts of Oak, may be a long way from the hard-hit financial districts of London and New York, but this domain of African club football is one of many across the continent being buffeted by the same icy, fiscal winds.

Though Hearts entered the mid-season break with a handsome lead over rivals Asante Kotoko at the top of the Ghana Premier League, doubt surrounds what prize may lie in wait for the eventual champions after the division's principle economic backer, satellite broadcaster GTV, recently went into liquidation.

Despite agreeing a £3.5million investment package in Ghana, the company folded on January 30 claiming the "instability [of] global markets" had caused a fatal shortfall in funding. Shortly afterwards, screens went blank for 125,000 subscribers and football fans across 22 African countries.

The loss of GTV is a major blow for certain regions because, along with offering the main draw of live action from the English Premier League, the company was also a key broadcaster and supporter of domestic football in sub-Saharan Africa.

Two live games from the relaunched Ghana Premier League aired across the continent each week for the first time on the Gsports network. GTV also covered the Tanzanian Premier League, signed the first rights deal for the Ugandan Super League and rescued an ailing CECAFA Cup with a £423,000-a-year sponsorship package. In an area where the allure of the foreign game has seen a critical dwindling of local clubs' gate receipts, the pay-television cash and promotion provided a lifeline.

Moses Magogo, competitions secretary of the Uganda Football Association (FUFA), says of the GTV deal: "Our league and national side increased in value because of the coverage. The standard of the games increased because each place in the league, at the end of the season, meant the difference of £5,600; every match mattered. Away teams could afford to travel ahead of their fixtures and pay for accommodation for the first time."

FUFA has yet to find new sponsors but Magogo still hopes to receive money owed to it from the broadcaster's liquidators.

The situation is replicated on the west coast. Former GTV presenter Yaw Ampofo Ankrah says: "Word spread among the fans that local teams were back on television and this created a lot of hype. I even had emails from fans in Rwanda saying how much they enjoyed watching live games from Ghana. No one is sure what will happen now."

Ben Wyatt

Life without

Major League Soccer can feel pretty good about itself as its 14th season kicks off – even if its best-known player won't be around

"MLS has plans for two additional clubs after 2010 and so far seven cities have expressed an interest"

USA

PAUL GARDNER in New York

YES, YES, OF COURSE the David Beckham issue has overshadowed everything – at least as far as the headlines are concerned – in the MLS. But the league lives its own life and plenty is happening beyond the Beckham boundaries.

From the historical point of view, MLS can feel pretty good about itself as it enters its 14th year. It now has 15 clubs, and will be expanding to 16 next year. Compare that to the situation when the old North American Soccer League celebrated its 14th birthday, back in 1982.

On the face of it things look very similar, with the NASL having 14 clubs, but it was shrinking rapidly. In 1981, there were 21 clubs; it was down to 14 the following year and by 1984, when it folded, it had shrunk to nine.

So, at the same point that the NASL was withering away, MLS is expanding. This year the new franchise in Seattle will begin, next year sees the addition of Philadelphia. After that, MLS has unveiled plans for two additional clubs "over the next few years", and there is no shortage of interested parties. So far the count is seven – Miami, Atlanta, St Louis, Portland, Montreal, Ottawa and Vancouver.

To acquire a franchise, the group representing each city must pay a £28.5million fee to MLS. They will also have to undergo the usual scrutiny for financial stability and have a suitable stadium – or plans to build a new one.

The most interesting of the applicants was undoubtedly Miami, where the ownership group consisted of a partnership between Bolivian businessman Marcelo Claure and Spanish giants Barcelona. At one point it looked a sure thing that Miami would get its franchise, but the gloomy global financial situation intervened and both Barcelona and Claure withdrew, saying that this was not the time to go ahead.

Claure also made it clear that he felt Beckham's withdrawal from MLS was a negative factor.

That would seem to be the only cloud on the horizon, though it does contain a warning about the possible adverse effects of the current recession. MLS commissioner Don Garber says the league is "doing fine", while admitting that – along with all other sports leagues – it will probably feel a financial pinch as sponsors cut back their spending.

Stadium building

Another possible area in which the threat of reduced expenditure might be expected – but which has yet to materialise – is in stadium building. MLS has been particularly successful in getting its clubs to build soccer-specific stadiums and many are joint ventures between the franchise owners and the local city authorities.

These are not huge facilities – the average capacity is around 22,000 – but they show a commitment to the sport that, to make the comparison again, was lacking in the old NASL, whose clubs always played in borrowed gridiron or baseball stadiums.

MLS now has seven new stadiums in use. The late Lamar Hunt got things going when he built a stadium for the Columbus Crew that opened in 1999. A rather Spartan construction, it nevertheless provided the model for others. Four years later, the Home Depot Center, now home of both Los Angeles Galaxy and Chivas USA, opened, a much more elaborate building. FC Dallas followed with Pizza Hut Park in 2005, and since then new stadiums have arrived yearly – Chicago in 2006,

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Beckham

Been there, bought the T-shirt... Galaxy fans contemplate the future without the club's star attraction

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Colorado and Toronto in 2007, Salt Lake in 2008. Next year New York Red Bulls' new home – already under construction – will open, along with a new stadium for the Philadelphia expansion team.

DC United, one of the league's most successful franchises, are also the last to be renting a facility – the huge JFK stadium in downtown Washington. But JFK is 48 years old and DC United, evidently having found dealing with the politics of the city too much to take, have announced plans to move to suburban Maryland and build a new stadium in Prince George's County.

Surely the most encouraging recent event for MLS has been the astonishing Seattle saga. The ownership group for a start, aside from the necessary wealth, has a sturdy American feel to it. It includes Hollywood film producer Joe Roth, Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen and comedian Drew Carey. In not much more than a year, 20,000 season tickets were sold, more than any other MLS club has ever managed.

On the television front, no news is good news for MLS. It has eight-year deals with both ESPN and Univision (a Spanish language station). Those are the national networks, but each MLS club also has a deal with a local television station so every league game is broadcast. Ratings are not as good as MLS would like, but remain steady.

The structure of the MLS 2009 season will not change, meaning there will be play-offs, for which the top eight teams will qualify, to decide the champions. The system is decried by traditionalists who want the title to go to the regular-season points winner, but Garber is right to insist on play-offs for they are an essential part of all American professional sports leagues.

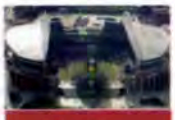
Last year saw MLS showing signs of football maturity when it experienced a severe case of fixture congestion. The biggest snarl-up came when DC United and Houston had to play in both the CONCACAF Champions League and the Superliga (played between clubs from MLS and the Mexican league).

It was considered significant that neither DC United nor Houston won anything last year, while MLS Cup finalists New York and Columbus had played only MLS fixtures. In the coming season, clubs will play either in the CONCACAF Cup or the Superliga but not both.

Development players

Squads have been reduced from 28 to 24 players, but within that total the number of senior players a club can carry has been upped from 18 to 20. The remaining players are classified as developmental players and receive a decidedly meagre yearly wage of between £10,600 and £14,200. An overall team salary cap – an essential feature of the league's single-entity structure – remains in place. It increases slightly every year and now stands at £1.7m per team.

A four-year experiment with reserve teams has been abandoned after MLS decided that these contribute little to player development and are not worth the expense involved. The league will, however, continue to encourage its teams to run youth academies.



"MLS new boys Seattle Sounders have an American ownership group which includes a Hollywood producer and the co-founder of Microsoft, Paul Allen"

Player development is something of a conundrum for MLS, the question being for whom are the players being developed? If promising young Americans all choose to play in MLS, no problem. But those players are now being scouted, and signed, by European clubs. This may be good business for MLS – last season it received £7m from Villarreal for Red Bulls forward Jozy Altidore – but it is not the way to build up its strength as an American league.

The predicament gets more complicated. The accepted "American way" of player development is that a player will star in college, and on graduation (i.e. after four years) will then enter the draft system and be signed by a pro club. But the system does not work well for football because the colleges are not up to the task of preparing players. Landon Donovan, Freddy Adu and DaMarcus Beasley simply did not go to college.

The few outstanding college players are well aware they would be better off – both in terms of development and, obviously, income – with a pro club. Some choose to leave college early, say after two years, while those who do stay the full four may then decide to bypass the MLS draft altogether and seek their future in Europe.

Glad to return

Maybe MLS can garner some satisfaction, though, for many of the Americans do not make it and are glad to return to the USA and MLS. This season there are at least six such returnees: Steve Purdy (1860 Munich, Germany, to FC Dallas); Andrew Jacobson, (Lorient, France, to DC United); Tally Hall (Esbjerg, Denmark, to Houston); Mike Videira (Hamilton Academical, Scotland, to New England); Bobby Convey (Reading, England, to San Jose); and Cam Weaver (Haugesund, Norway, to San Jose). Goalkeeper Kasey Keller is also returning – in his case after years of success at the top level in Europe.

Possibly, players are becoming less enamoured of the European route. This year, top Americans such as Pablo Mastroeni (Colorado), Chad Marshall (Columbus), and Kenny Cooper (Dallas) have chosen to stay with MLS. Among foreign designated players, Cuauhtemoc Blanco (Chicago), Juan Pablo Angel (New York) and Guillermo Barros Schelotto (Columbus) are all staying. Beckham is another story. But there is, evidently, plenty of life without David. ●

MLS team preview, see page 99

What it adds up to...Columbus Crew (in yellow) and New York Red Bulls contest the 2008 MLS Cup

Another one bites the dust...El Salvador keeper Juan Jose Gomez goes down against Costa Rica

Crying foul

The Central Americans are in contention to qualify for the 2010 World Cup amid accusations of unsporting behaviour

EL SALVADOR

BRIAN HOMEWOOD

ONCE CONSIDERED the strongest side in Central America – before they were overtaken by Costa Rica and Honduras – El Salvador have reached the final stage of the CONCACAF regional World Cup qualifiers for the first time in 12 years.

Mexican coach Carlos De los Cobos has worked hard in difficult circumstances to make the team competitive since taking over in August 2006, having been faced with constant bickering from local clubs over the release of players and at one stage facing a walkout by the squad over a pay row.

Another bright spot is Eliseo Quintanilla, a 26-year-old midfielder with CD Aguila who is one of the most talented players the country has produced in years.

But the national team's revival has been accompanied by some unsavoury incidents, including allegations of urine throwing and racism by their fans, and the suspension of a recent match after they were reduced to six players in suspicious circumstances.

In June last year, El Salvador were trailing visitors Panama 1-0 at half-time in the second leg of a preliminary World Cup qualifying round tie, having already lost the first leg 1-0.

However, the home side still went through, scoring three times in the last 20 minutes (including a controversial penalty) as Panama had two players sent off.

> "The national team's revival has been accompanied by some unsavoury incidents"

"From the start to the finish of the game our players were constantly insulted by the public who, in addition to the racist insults, threw bottles, bags of water and bags of urine, amid the indifference of the police, who should have given protection," said the Panamanian federation in a letter to FIFA.

Panama also complained about the referee, Marco Antonio Rodriguez of Mexico, who they claimed, among other things, failed to stop the game when a bottle was thrown at their goalkeeper Jaime Penedo.

Despite this, nothing was ever heard of the matter and, surprisingly, Rodriguez was also put in charge of El Salvador's World Cup qualifier at home to Trinidad & Tobago in February which ended 2-2.

Disgraced again

El Salvador had disgraced themselves again even before the Trinidad match; this time in a UNCAF tournament in Honduras, which is a qualifying competition for the Gold Cup.

Facing Costa Rica in the semi-finals, El Salvador had two players sent off in the first 25 minutes and were soon 1-0 down.

In such a situation, a coach may be expected to avoid making substitutions in case he runs out of players. But De los Cobos did exactly the opposite, replacing one player in the 21st minute and two more at half-time.

Within 15 minutes of the restart, two Salvadorean players went down claiming to be injured and the game was called off because, with only six players, they were below the minimum number needed to carry on.

An investigation was promised, which could have led to El Salvador being kicked out of the Gold Cup in July (they had already qualified by reaching the semis) but, as with the Panama incident, the authorities went strangely silent.

"We've had a bad night. The referee saw things which didn't happen, his performance damaged El Salvador and stained the tournament. What happened afterwards was a circumstance of football, my players would never fake injuries. Our pride is intact," said De los Cobos afterwards, insisting the injuries were genuine and blaming the referee...who just happened to be from Panama. ●

Read daily dispatches at worldsoccer.com

Alarm bells ring for Lippi

Defeat by Brazil shows the *Azzurri* coach has a lot of work ahead of a meeting with the Republic of Ireland

ITALY

PADDY AGNEW in Rome

"THERE IS ONE good aspect to this result. Nobody will be breaking my balls any more about my record-breaking run. We can concentrate on other things."

On the day after Italy were beaten 2-0 by Brazil in a prestige friendly at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium in London, Marcello Lippi had to look long and hard to find any comfort in a defeat which ended his 31-match unbeaten run as Italy coach. Lippi now remains tied with Javier Clemente of Spain and Alfio Basile of Argentina in the ranks of unbeaten national team managers.

In all probability, though, Lippi will have been more concerned about the comprehensive nature of his team's defeat than his failure to set a new record. In a game which Brazil seemed to take a great deal more seriously than Italy, goals from Elano and Robinho settled the match within the first half-hour.

Italy could point to the fact that left-back Fabio Grosso had a perfectly good goal disallowed after only four minutes, but that would be to miss the point. As Lippi conceded the following day: "We were too timid; the exact opposite of the Brazilians, who chose to turn the game into a sort of pretend World Cup Final. They took to the pitch with a terrific spirit. You would have thought they were the world champions, not us."

Lippi had started off with an experienced line-up, featuring Grosso, Gianluigi Buffon, Fabio Cannavaro and Gianluca Zambrotta in defence, Daniele De Rossi and Andrea Pirlo in midfield, with Simone Pepe, Alberto Gilardino and Antonio Di Natale in attack. Only Nicola Legrottaglie in central defence and Riccardo Montolivo in midfield could be considered "reserves" in the current Lippi set-up.

However, Italy struggled against a dynamic Brazil team which featured a number of players – Julio Cesar (Inter), Maicon (Inter), Juan (Roma), Felipe Melo (Fiorentina), Ronaldinho (Milan) and Adriano (Inter) – only too familiar to Serie A fans.

Following the pattern of his preparations for the 2006 World Cup in Germany, Lippi had been happy to play against the toughest opposition available but he admitted to more than a little disappointment.

> **"You would have thought Brazil were the world champions, and not us"**
>
> *Marcello Lippi*

Looking for answers

"I thought I was a lot further down the road in the construction of the 'new Italy'," he said. "Do you remember how I prepared for the World Cup in Germany? I was the one who asked to play friendlies against teams of world standing such as Germany and Holland. I was looking for answers in those games and I got them. After this result, though, I now know I have a lot of work to do."

With Gennaro Gattuso ruled out through injury for the rest of the season, and Pirlo still short of his best form after a long autumnal injury lay-off, it was obvious that Italy would suffer in midfield where Gilberto Silva, Elano and Felipe Melo ruled the roost. While waiting for Gattuso's return and for Pirlo to rediscover his best form, Fiorentina's Montolivo hardly looked like the answer to Italy's problems.

With an eye on the World Cup qualifiers away to Montenegro (on March 28) and home to the Republic of Ireland (April 1),

the Brazil game did throw up one positive note. Villarreal striker Giuseppe Rossi, a second-half substitute for Di Natale, did well enough for 1982 World Cup-winning coach Enzo Bearzot to compare him favourably with such past icons as Bruno Conti and Paolo Rossi.

The defeat, however, confirmed the impression left by the autumn qualifiers that Italy were top of their group without playing well.

After the 2-1 win against Montenegro in October, Lippi had sounded quietly confident, but after the Brazil defeat he hot-footed it to Dublin to see for himself the side coached by old rival Giovanni Trapattoni – and that looks like it will become his biggest Group 8 problem. ●

time...Simone Pepe gets the better of Brazil's Marcelo

London lessons

The friendly victory over Italy was a welcome boost for the national side ahead of challenging World Cup qualifiers

BRAZIL

TIM VICKERY in Rio de Janeiro

FEBRUARY'S FRIENDLY against Italy in London came at an awkward time for the Brazil camp. While they were in town, Luiz Felipe Scolari was sacked by Chelsea – and the current national team coach, Dunga, would almost certainly not have been offered the job in 2006 had Scolari been available.

From the same region of Brazil and with the same, blunt, team-before-stars approach, Dunga was seen as a poor man's Big Phil. Some thought of him as a short-term stand-in. "Watch out Dunga, Scolari's free" was the headline in one Brazilian paper.

So on the back of November's 6-2 thrashing of an alarmingly naive Portugal, beating Italy 2-0 at the Emirates must have come as a huge boost to Dunga's morale.

The real test, though, comes in the competitive matches. World Cup qualification resumes at the end of March when Brazil face a tricky trip up the Andes to face Ecuador in Quito, where they have been beaten in the previous two campaigns. Then, three days later, they are at home to Peru when only a convincing win will do.

Dunga's men have been held to goalless draws in their last three home World Cup qualifiers. This may have been no disgrace against Argentina, but it was unacceptable against Bolivia and unimpressive against Colombia.

It has brought into sharp focus the defects of the current side. When results are disappointing the nationalist local press generally turns on the foreign-based players who they claim are mercenaries that don't care about Brazil, and so on. However, the Olympics put a stop to that argument after some of the squad defied their clubs to take part...and Brazil still lost.

The next attack is based on the team's mental approach: they played badly because their attitude was wrong. Recent results have made this one hard to sustain as well. Three days before being held at home

"The real test comes in the competitive World Cup matches that resume at the end of March"

by Bolivia, they won 3-0 away to Chile. And the same happened before the goalless draw at home to Colombia, with a 4-0 win in Venezuela. Why was the attitude perfect on the Sunday but deficient by the Wednesday? Clearly there was something deeper, something more intrinsically to do with football.

Events on the field had made it obvious that Brazil can count on one of the most devastating counter-attacks in the world game, but they are labouring ineffectively to break down opponents who adopt a cautious approach. The most depressing aspect of their home form is that Brazil have not looked like scoring.

This is unlikely to jeopardise their qualification for South Africa, but it will damage their chances of winning the tournament since World Cup opponents are unlikely to leave themselves open to the counter.

Against Italy, Dunga responded by giving powerful right-back Maicon complete freedom to push forward. The Internazionale defender had effectively decided the outcome of November's match against Portugal, who had enjoyed most of the first half even though they trailed 2-1 at the interval. After the break, Cristiano Ronaldo moved infield and Maicon was suddenly free, with acres of space in front of him, and a 2-1 scoreline almost immediately became 4-1.

To take advantage of Maicon's surges against Italy, Gilberto Silva often dropped to cover like a third centre-back, while the versatility of Elano was also highlighted as he came back to cover while also drifting infield in attack to profit from the space Maicon created.

Ronaldinho doubts

Ronaldinho played the full 90 minutes but with this system it is doubtful he can be included in the starting line-up if everyone is fit. With Gilberto Silva dropping and Elano working the right, there must be another specialist midfielder to hold the centre and push left. Against Italy it was Felipe Melo, while Anderson and Hernanes are also strong candidates. It leaves two places for the trio of Kaka, Robinho and Ronaldinho – and that is surely the pecking order at present.

Dunga, of course, could decide to go back to 4-2-3-1 and field them all against Peru on April 1 – their opponents are bottom of the table and have lost all five away games.

But whatever formation they play, if Brazil fail to score this time it will look like one big April Fool's joke. ●

Up among the big boys...Sivasspor (in white) take on Galatasaray

Uygun gamble

TURKEY

MEHMET DEMIRCAN in Istanbul

HAVING MAINTAINED the form that saw them top the Super League at the winter break, Sivasspor now have their sights set on becoming the first team other than Fenerbahce, Galatasaray, Besiktas and Trabzonspor to win the title.

It's all a far cry from two years ago when the team from the city of Sivas, far east of Istanbul, sacked their Slovakian coach, Karol Pecze, and general manager Bulent Uygun was forced to take charge. Former national team midfielder Uygun (see *Six of the Best*, page 62) had no coaching experience but the Sivasspor board, led by ambitious young chairman Mecnun Otyakmaz, gambled on him.

A year later, when the "red and whites" led the league during the autumn, the gamble looked to have paid off. But to maintain their challenge, Sivasspor needed money to make big-name signings for the second half of the season.

With the club facing a financial shortfall, Otyakmaz appealed to the Turkish government to bail them out.

"Istanbul is a big city with a big

paying off

Turkey's "big four" have got themselves a bright new challenger in Sivasspor

economy, but Sivas is small, we have no sponsors, no big ticket sales and no merchandising. The government should boost us with a financial package," he said.

But Otyakmaz's pleas fell on deaf ears. The bailout never happened and the league ended with a familiar name, Galatasaray, as champions.

Creditable fourth

However, Sivasspor still managed a highly creditable fourth place and, after a brief spell in the InterToto Cup, they started this season completely focused on building upon last term's achievements.

They managed to hold on to players such as Mehmet Yildiz, Pini Balili and Musa Aydin – while also signing Cameroon forward Herve Tum and Brazilian defender Bilica – and once again they rose to first place. This time they also became the first club from outside the big four to be top at the winter break, and they were joined in January by French striker Yannick Kamanan from Maccabi Tel Aviv.

Much of Sivasspor's success can be attributed to hard work and solid defence, and they can also rely on vociferous support in the 15,000-capacity 4 Eylul stadium which is almost always full, even when the temperature drops to minus five in the winter.

How long Uygun stays in Sivas is open to question and he admits: "I believe in myself and I think that one day I will come back to Turkey with the Champions League or the UEFA Cup. I just don't know with which team..."

Such comments may suggest Uygun has ambitions to coach in Istanbul. But for now he is concentrating on Sivas, where he has done a great job holding a team together and creating a fifth force in Turkish football on a budget of less than £5million. ●

> "One day I'll come back to Turkey with the Champions League or UEFA Cup"
>
> *Bulent Uygun*

Cream rises to top

But goals remain a problem for the leading sides in Ligue 1

HOWARD JOHNSON in Paris

FOR THE FIRST time in many a long moon the top of the league genuinely reflects the hierarchy of the French game. After 26 games the top three slots were occupied by the country's three biggest clubs: Lyon, Paris Saint-Germain and Marseille. This despite the latter two clubs having to settle for 0-0 draws against lowly opponents.

PSG's visit to Grenoble and Marseille's home meeting with Le Mans proved disappointing for respective coaches Paul Le Guen and Eric Gerets and valuable points were dropped. This will please nobody – except Lyon supporters as their team kept ahead of the pack – at a time when people were starting to whisper there might just be a genuine battle for the title for the first time in years.

Of course, a lack of goals is nothing new and this has greatly contributed to the ever-increasing popularity of English football in France. While the country's top four clubs had managed a combined total of 156 goals so far this season, the top four in the Premier League had already rifled in 178. The top individual goalscorers in the two championships are both French and have scored the same number of goals; Chelsea's Nicolas Anelka has 15 to his name, as does Andre-Pierre Gignac of Toulouse.

Gignac took a while to settle at the club currently lying fifth after avoiding relegation by the skin of their teeth last season. He arrived in Toulouse with a big reputation in 2007 after impressing at Lorient, but Gignac's first season was an unmitigated disaster as he scored just twice in 19 appearances. Since Swede Johan Elmander's move across the Channel to Bolton, however, Gignac has blossomed as the club's first-choice striker and his scoring rate is even more impressive than it might first appear, given that Toulouse have managed just 28 so far.

How Saint-Etienne would love to have a Gignac. Traditionally as popular with the French public as PSG and Marseille, *Les Verts* are still in the drop zone despite the best efforts of former Marseille, Portsmouth and Lyon manager Alain Perrin, who took over the reins from Laurent Roussey in November. They have scored just 24 league goals and face a real dogfight to preserve top-flight status.

All is not lost for Saint-Etienne, though. While Le Havre look dead and buried at the foot of the table, it is no exaggeration to say that any two of nine clubs could end up slipping through the trapdoor with them at the end of the season.

> **"Gignac's first season at Toulouse was an unmitigated disaster. But since Elmander's move across the Channel, he has blossomed"**

France's 2-0 friendly loss to Argentina in Marseille was a fair result. *Les Bleus* showed some neat touches and the odd moment of invention, but the result was never really in doubt after Jonas Gutierrez opened the scoring with a smart snap shot just before half-time.

After Lionel Messi's brilliant solo strike for Argentina's second goal the crowd quickly let their distaste for coach Raymond Domenech be known.

"Domenech out" resounded around the ground and, in what was a surreal moment, home supporters greeted every Argentinian touch with an "ole" while roundly booing any French player who got hold of the ball.

There is more to this than simple anti-Domenech feeling, though. French nationals of Arab descent taking against the national team is a problem that has become a political issue. The situation was complicated even further when Lyon striker Karim Benzema, a player with an Arab background, was booed furiously when he took the field to replace the ineffectual Anelka. This had nothing to do with race and everything to do with Marseille supporters hating anyone who plays for a rival.

Can France put together a side that can compete with the world's best in South Africa? Yes, they probably can.

Even in defeat the likes of Bacary Sagna, Jeremy Toulalan and Lassana Diarra showed that Domenech's side have the basis of a strong defensive unit. Both William Gallas and Philippe Mexes need to be more consistent in their central-defensive partnership, but both have shown they have quality.

With Franck Ribery prompting effectively and Anelka at the top of his game the side has much going for it. But as Sagna said: "Whether we play at the Stade de France or in Marseille it doesn't feel like we're the home side. The public don't realise just how important they are." ●

Firing blanks...Marseille's Taye Taiwo gets in a shot against Le Mans but his side were held to a goalless draw

www.inpho.ie

Local support...Drogheda (claret and blue) host Shamrock at their United Park ground last season

Part-time pretenders

Failure to attract more fans to the domestic game is still a major problem

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
SEAN CREEDON in Dublin

THE IRISH have a reputation for liking a drink. But as every drinker knows, if not enough customers are going into a pub then the owner cannot afford to pay the staff exorbitant wages.

And that is what's been happening in the League of Ireland over the past few years, with attendances declining as the players' wages have spiralled out of control.

The situation came to a head last season when Drogheda United and Cork City went into examinership (administration), and several other clubs only got through the season after their squads took wage cuts.

Drogheda almost went out of business completely after pinning all their hopes on a move to a new out-of-town stadium. But objections to the floodlights scuppered the plans of the Drogs, who had overspent when they won the League for the only time in their history in 2007.

Cork went into examinership after just one season under new owners, but fortunately the Leesiders survived and seem safe for now at their renovated Turner's Cross ground.

This season clubs have had no choice but to cut back on wages as the FAI said it wouldn't issue licences to clubs unless they presented viable budgets. Meanwhile the Irish economy, which a few years ago was one of the strongest in Europe, is in free fall with rising unemployment and recapitalisation of the big banks.

A few years ago the aim was to have a full-time professional league, but this season only Bohemians, Dundalk, Derry City and Sligo Rovers can be considered full-time, while Cork and St Patrick's Athletic will have a mix of professionals and part-timers.

"What we need for this season is absolute stability," says League of Ireland director Fran Gavin. "From the administration side, we can only set the groundwork and set the scene for the clubs.

"When we did it last year it didn't really work. This year we had to bring in new regulations to allow us to make decisions. Now if a club goes into examinership there will be major consequences for them."

But while Irish airports and ferry ports are busy every weekend with fans making their way to see English Premiership games, and the Republic of Ireland can attract crowds of up to 70,000 to home internationals at Croke Park, there doesn't seem to be an appetite for the domestic league.

> "Irish airports and ferry ports are busy every weekend with fans making their way to see English Premiership games"

A serious drop in attendances at League of Ireland games began in the early 1970s as family trends changed and more people started playing junior football. There was a brief revival in the 1990s with a switch from the traditional Sunday afternoon kick-off to Friday night football, but that novelty soon wore off.

While the recent switch to summer football has improved the playing surfaces and helped clubs to compete in European competitions, the domestic league cannot compete with hurling and gaelic football for the hearts and minds of the locals during the summer months. However, Gavin remains upbeat and claims: "Nothing beats live football and I am confident that we can continue to attract more and more football fans to the live match day experience."

In reality, the chances of attendances – and therefore revenues increasing – are slim as fans continue to travel to England for big games...or even opt to watch the action on TV in one of the pubs where there is still enough money to pay the staff. ●

See page 98 for FAI Premier Division preview

Prayer meeting...Barcelona captain Carles Puyol seeks divine intervention during the defeat against Atletico Madrid

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Game on!

The title race has been blown wide open by Real Madrid's unbeaten run and a series of defeats for Barcelona

IF A WEEK is a long time in politics, it can be forever in football. Seven days were all it took to completely change attitudes on both sides of Spain's great divide and reopen a title race that appeared all over.

What seemed like – and in fact was – a baseless campaign from the Madrid media, what appeared an attempt to create a state of anxiety where none existed, began to look like it might actually have some foundation other than simple wishful thinking. One round of games later and it had become the most logical thing on earth.

Suddenly, Real Madrid supporters' *Cofradia del Clavo Ardiendo* (Brotherhood of Clutching at Straws) was reborn, blind faith bringing hope where previously there was none. Suddenly, concern returned to Catalunya. There were, the Madrid press unpleasantly put it, a few thousands pairs of soiled pants in Barcelona.

Going into the weekend of February 14/15, Barcelona led the league by a colossal 12 points, plus head-to-head goal difference. In other words, Real Madrid would have to claw back four victories on their arch-rivals – one of which would have to be by more than two goals to nil against Barcelona themselves – to win the League. They would have to win every single remaining game and still rely on Barcelona collapsing.

The task looked impossible. Barcelona had only lost once all season and that was on the opening day. Since then they had played 21 matches and not been beaten. They had only drawn twice, against Racing Santander and Getafe, and they had won 19 of the last 20, registering the club's best-ever run.

It did not matter that Real Madrid's results had improved dramatically under new coach Juande Ramos. His first league game in charge had been a 2-0 defeat to Barcelona but since then Madrid had won seven successive matches. Trouble is, it is no use winning seven on the trot when the team you are pursuing has won 10 in a row. Besides, while Barcelona were scoring goal after goal, well on course for 100 for the season, there was something oddly unconvincing about Madrid – even in victory.

Madrid had won seven on the trot, sure, but that run included four far-from-convincing 1-0 wins. Against relegation-bound Numancia they had won 2-0 but had been anything but impressive, and it took some dreadful refereeing and even worse goalkeeping for them to see off strugglers Osasuna 3-1 at home. Seven wins and not one genuinely good display. Not even the 3-0 against a pathetic Mallorca side, who gifted Madrid a goal in the opening two minutes, was much to write home about.

Barca on a roll

Meanwhile, Barcelona had put five past Deportivo, four past Numancia and three past Sporting and Mallorca. It was time for Madrid to give up. Or so it seemed. Then something strange happened. Barcelona didn't win. And Madrid did. Impressively.

On Saturday, February 14, Barcelona travelled to Real Betis. Two set plays and they found themselves 2-0 down at half-time. By the end of the game they had peppered the Betis goal and fought back to 2-2, thanks to two goals from Samuel Eto'o, but they had dropped two points. It was the glimmer of hope the capital's press had been waiting for and one front-page headline the following morning declared Madrid's trip to face Sporting Gijon that day a "golden opportunity".

They took it too. Sporting's defence might have been awful but at last Madrid were impressive – two goals from Raul, one from Klaas-Jan Huntelaar and another from Marcelo completing a 4-0 victory. The excitement kicked in. So did the Madrid propaganda machine.

There was some method in the madness. Two years ago, with the sports daily *AS* inventing the *Cofradia del Clavo Ardiendo*, with Madrid playing under the banner of "Juntos, podemos" (Together, we can do it) and the "spirit of Juanito" (named after the late midfielder Juanito), Fabio Capello's team won a barely plausible League title as Barcelona fell apart.

"Here was the country's divided sports press in all its schoolboy-in-a-playground simplicity. For a moment it appeared Madrid's dad was bigger than Barcelona's dad"

But, still, this was madness. Barcelona's lead was still 10 points; a bigger lead than Madrid had overcome in 2007. Bigger in fact than had ever been overhauled at the same stage in Spain. And while Barcelona had shown some signs of slipping – they had had to come back from behind against Racing, Osasuna and Betis, while the 4-1 against Numancia flattered them – there was no real hint of a collapse. Barcelona had still not been beaten since the opening day.

Not that it stopped the press. The campaign to pile on the pressure was relentless. "The league is reborn," screamed the cover of *Marca* the next day. Every day for the rest of the following week the message on the cover of the two main sports dailies in Madrid was the same.

Then came the big one on the front of *Marca*: alongside a photo of Pep Guardiola hiding his face, it screamed: "Canguelo in Can Barcelona", which roughly translates as "Barcelona have the jitters, Barcelona are running scared". Quotes from players from both clubs littered the cover: "Sergio Ramos: if they slip up again they'll get nervous"; "Xavi: in Madrid they believe in comebacks"; "Sergio Busquets: we can't rule them out."

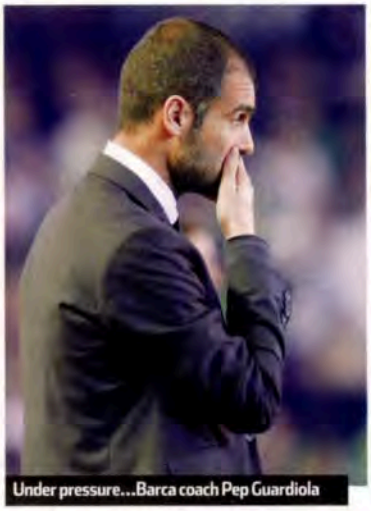
The response from Catalunya was inevitable and if anyone doubted the belligerent bias of the country's divided sports press, here it was in all its schoolboy-in-the-playground simplicity. For a moment, at least, it appeared Madrid's dad was bigger than Barcelona's dad.

When the Catalan media asked aloud "what on earth are you talking about?" the answer arrived in devastating fashion. This, said the Madrid press, is what we're talking

about. On Saturday, February 21, Real Madrid battered Betis 6-1. At the same time, Barcelona were incredibly defeated 2-1 by Espanyol – the first time they had been beaten by their city rivals in 27 years and the first time that the team at the bottom of the Spanish league had ever beaten the team at the top. The following week it got even better.

In just seven days, a 12-point lead had been cut to seven, Barcelona had sewn serious doubts and Madrid had scored 10 goals, transforming their image. "The crappingyourselfometre has hit 800 crapahertz," gloated one columnist in Madrid.

Never mind a state of optimism, a state of euphoria had been declared in Madrid. Suddenly everything was possible. Even, said Raul on the cover of *Marca*, the double. The excitement


Under pressure...Barca coach Pep Guardiola

took hold of the whole club, chests puffed out, pride took hold, and optimism was rampant. But you couldn't help thinking they had got a tiny bit carried away.

If proof seemed to come a day later when president Vicente Boluda announced – in rather impolite terms – that his side was going to run rings round Liverpool in the Champions League, it soon transpired that the optimism was well-founded, domestically at least.

After losing 1-0 to Liverpool at the Santiago Bernabeu, Real returned to domestic duties at the weekend and beat Espanyol 2-0, while Barcelona lost an incredible match 4-3 to Atletico Madrid. The gap at the top of the table was down to just four points, leaving the Catalan press talking of a crisis.

If the Madrid media had been on a mission it was time to pat themselves on the back. Mission accomplished. Game on. ●

Hiddink's dilemma

Most Russians have accepted the national team coach's temporary role at Chelsea

RUSSIA
VICTOR GUSEV in MOSCOW

NATIONAL TEAM manager Guus Hiddink's appointment as coach of Chelsea until the end of the season sparked some minor protests outside the offices of the Russian Football Union (RFU) from a small group of fans angry at the influence of the London club's owner, Roman Abramovich, in the affair.

Generally, though, people are sympathetic to Hiddink's dilemma and reaction to his move to England would have been much harsher had the Dutchman not already convinced the Russian public that he is always right in his decisions.

Hiddink has stressed a number of times that the national team remains his top priority and that preparations for World Cup qualifying games against Azerbaijan and Liechtenstein will not be hampered by his involvement with Chelsea. By the time of the next qualifier, against Finland in June, the English season will be over.

"Chelsea asked me to help out until the end of the season and I have done it because of the strong links between the Chelsea owner and the Russian federation," said Hiddink. "I will help out to the end of the season. I have my work with Russia which I will fulfil."

"Chelsea's owner is our partner and it would have been wrong to neglect his request for Hiddink"

RFU boss Vitaly Mutko

Concerns have been expressed that combining the two posts will not give Hiddink enough time to watch national team squad players at Russian Premier League games. But Hiddink has stressed that this is the job of his experienced assistants, Aleksandr Borodyuk and Igor Korneev, who report to him regularly. And Hiddink's widely publicised role as a "general coordinator for Russian football", helping develop the system on different levels, is now out of the question.

Bankrolled by Abramovich

The new situation is viewed as inevitable from a financial point of view. According to RFU president Vitaly Mutko, Hiddink's national team contract, which expires in 2010, is largely bankrolled by the National Academy of Football (NAF), which in turn is funded and controlled by Abramovich.

"Hiddink's annual salary is £6.28million. NAF gives us £4.48m. The difference has to be covered by the RFU, but even this is difficult for us because of the financial crisis," says Mutko.

"Chelsea's owner is our strategic partner and it would have been wrong to neglect his request [to start negotiations with Hiddink on his coming to Chelsea]." ●

Hiddink protest...a small group of Russian fans outside the RFU offices in Moscow

Shrek star...Fabbiani has made a big impact at River Plate

Status quo rules

As the European transfer market dries up, clubs are forced to stick with their existing squads

ARGENTINA

ERIC WEIL in BUENOS AIRES

IT HAS BEEN calculated that 40 per cent of Argentinian clubs' total revenue comes from transfers, the most profitable of which are the big-money moves to Europe.

But with the global recession taking its toll, and players' agents holding up deals by haggling for a bigger cut, a mere half-dozen players swapped continents in the recent January transfer window. As a result, most teams managed to keep their existing squads for the 2008-09 closing championship, leading many pundits to predict business as usual. But the reality was somewhat different.

After just three rounds of league games no team had managed to preserve a 100 per cent record. And the three clubs that played off for the opening championship title – Boca Juniors, San Lorenzo and Tigre – picked up just six points out of a possible 27 between them. Meanwhile River Plate, who finished bottom of the apertura, were among the early pace-setters.

> "Only half a dozen players swapped continents in January"

River remain a mystery, having performed so poorly in the last tournament despite retaining roughly the same personnel that they had at their disposal in the 2008 clausura, which they won.

For the 2009 clausura, Los Millonarios have added striker Cristian Fabbiani and 33-year-old former international midfielder Marcelo Gallardo, who is back at his first club after a disappointing spell with DC United in the US.

Fabbiani, who is nicknamed "Ogre" because of a similarity to the cartoon character Shrek, has been the dominant personality of the new campaign and is already a cult figure, despite the fact he's struggling for a place after being told to lose some weight.

Even before he had played a game Fabbiani was looked upon as the team's saviour and fans turn up to games with Shrek masks. He marked his return to the club by coming off the bench to score the winner away to Rosario Central.

Past problems

Fabbiani has had problems at previous clubs, however. At Newell's Old Boys, where players were owed several months pay, the club paid him every penny he was owed in a bid to get him to sign a new contract, but he took the money and left anyway. Then on his way to sign for Velez Sarsfield he changed his mind and joined River Plate instead.

Despite the early season surprises, one thing has not changed. Visiting fans can still not go to lower-division matches and can only travel in limited numbers to games in the top flight. It's a poor way to stop hooliganism and the rule has been much abused.

Both Rosario clubs, Newell's and Central, have been attempting to break the powerful grip of hooligan gangs and have also been facing up to the problems left by outgoing club officials. At Newell's, former president Eduardo Lopez left them with a debt of more than £6m.

Hooligan gangs kept Lopez in power at Newell's for 14 years, exerting their influence to ensure he managed to avoid elections. When he finally stood – and lost – an election, hooligans wrecked the club, stealing everything they could take. Not content with that, they returned a few weeks later to smash everything which members had voluntarily repaired. ●

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Inconsistency rules

This year's Bundesliga is the title race that nobody wants to win

GERMANY

NICK BIDWELL in Munich

IN A SEASON when the seating plan at the top of the table changes from week to week, it is tempting to regard the 2008-09 edition as the championship that no one wants to win. While Germans may not fully understand the concept of queuing, their league very much has an "after you" quality to it these days.

All half-dozen contenders – Bayern, Hoffenheim, Hamburg and Hertha, plus outsiders Leverkusen and Wolfsburg – have had their moments of alarming fallibility. All possess a capacity for self-harm, and significant weak points which could derail their ambitions unless treated as a matter of urgency. All could be line dancers: one step forward, one step back.

With so many possible permutations, the German title race is one of the most open and exciting in Europe; democracy in action compared to the dull one-club rule on offer in so many domestic leagues these days. While it's far from perfect – it can be rough and ready at times – if you want unpredictability, the Bundesliga has to be the place for you.

Inconsistency is the element keeping the top-six playing field relatively level and no team has aided the process more than winter champions Hoffenheim, whose performance graph for early 2009 unexpectedly took a downward turn with a 1-1 draw at bottom club Monchengladbach and a shattering 4-1 home loss to Leverkusen.

Defensive frailties not apparent before Christmas have suddenly surfaced and there are legitimate doubts whether Ralf Rangnick's side have enough gas in the tank to maintain their pressing game to the finishing line. On the bright side, the season-ending knee injury suffered by top scorer Vedad Ibisevic might not prove as costly as initially thought. Long-striding Senegalese attacker Demba Ba has picked up the baton with some style, racking up a memorable hat-trick in a 3-3 draw in the south-west derby at Stuttgart.

At Hamburg, title talk has been encouraged by wins at home to Bayern and at Leverkusen. Boss Martin Jol, who has been in situ only since the summer, has assembled a team of considerable heart, enterprise and tactical adaptability. While their football does not particularly flow, they do know how to hold their nerve and have a feel for the right time to force the issue. They are not, though, beyond a matchday blackout, such as in the 3-2 loss at Karlsruhe when they let slip a two-goal lead.

Spirited Hertha

Hertha, enjoying their best campaign since finishing third in 1999, are the sort of ultra-reliable team to set your watch by, so fastidiously organised by Swiss coach Lucien Favre, so compact, workmanlike and spirited. Yet even their finely-tuned machine has produced results of wildly differing hue since the winter break: the glowing technicolor of a gutsy 2-1 victory over Bayern at the Olympic Stadium; the grey of a solid, if uninspiring, 1-1 draw at lowly Bielefeld; and raging red in the wake of a 2-1 defeat at Wolfsburg, who have turned their backyard into a fortress.

Favre deserves JFK status in the capital for the way he has wrung every last gram from a group of mainly artisans. Some complain that they only ever win by the narrowest of margins (nine of their 12 victories have been by a single goal), but the real problem is Hertha's overt counter-attacking strategy, which only works against the big boys.

Against Bayern, for example, they had a fraction of the champions' possession and chances, yet still came through courtesy of two Andriy Voronin goals. But when Hertha face clubs with even less ambition than their own, they lose their way. Ad libbing is not a hallmark of this team.

What Bayern coach Jurgen Klinsmann would give for a rearguard of Hertha's solidity. A clutch of new year defeats – in Hamburg and Berlin, and at home to Koln – plunged his side into crisis and "Klinsi" stands accused of not having enough locks on his back door. Lucio and Martin Demichelis appear sluggish in central defence, and midfield holder Mark Van Bommel goes walkabout too often. Bayern are not out of the title hunt but a change of emphasis is a must. It's time to ditch the Klinsmann mantra of individual improvement in favour of collective drills.

On the international front, Germany began the new year in the same vein as they finished the old – weary, uninspired and beaten at home in a friendly. After the defeat by England in Berlin last November, they were mugged 1-0 in Dusseldorf by a Norway side in transition after the glory days of the 1990s.

As honest as ever, coach Joachim Low described his team's downfall as "deserved" and stressed the need to learn the lessons arising from defeat. Top of the list should be the need for greater defensive solidity. Schalke centre-back Heiko Westermann looked particularly unsure of himself and on the whole the defence lacked cohesion.

Low knew full well what to expect from the game plan of recently recalled Norway boss Egil Olsen: massed defence with a-wing-and-a-prayer counter. The trouble was Germany lacked the ideas, speed and ingenuity to unblock the dam.

Bastian Schweinsteiger and Piotr Trochowski – so impressive for Hamburg of late – were rarely able to penetrate, while the vastly experienced central duo of skipper Michael Ballack and Torsten Frings had games to forget.

Amid all the depression, one player did have something to smile about. In the 78th minute, Werder Bremen playmaker Mesut Ozil, born in Germany to Turkish parents, made his international debut, thus ending a serious tug-of-war for his services. "I chose Germany because I was brought up and became a pro footballer here," said the 20-year-old. "I'm hoping migrants will perhaps now identify more with the German team." ●

> **"I'm hoping migrants will perhaps now identify more with the German team"**
>
> *Mesut Ozil, of Turkish descent, after his international debut against Norway*

It's tough up here...Hertha keeper Jaroslav Drobny emerges from a scramble for the ball during a clash with champions Bayern Munich

Hopes and fears

The new J.League season gets under way amid great expectation and major financial worries

JAPAN

MIKE PLASTOW in Tokyo

DESPITE A RISING profile in Asia thanks to Gamba Osaka's Champions League victory, plus buoyant attendance figures and Kashima Antlers' quest for a third successive league title, why is it so hard to predict what will happen in the J.League this season?

Well, one of the reasons is the extraordinary flux in fortunes on the field.

With the noteworthy exception of Antlers, none of last season's leading sides have ever won the championship. So if Antlers are to be stopped from winning a record-breaking third title this year, the odds that a first-time winner will take their crown have to be short...and there are plenty of candidates to choose from, starting with Kawasaki Frontale, Nagoya Grampus, Oita Trinita, Shimizu S-Pulse and FC Tokyo – the teams that finished from second to sixth last year.

Meanwhile, some of the old guard are floundering. Tokyo Verdy, who won the J.League's first two titles, have been relegated and seem headed for another change of ownership, while Jubilo Iwata have been slipping since their third championship in 2002 and only just beat the drop last season, first on goal difference and then by squeaking through the play-off.

Yokohama F.Marinos, also three-times champions, were another who looked in serious relegation trouble at one point last year, and even with talk of Shunsuke Nakamura returning from Celtic in the summer they are badly in need of reinforcements.

The other big element of uncertainty is off the field in the shape of the global financial crisis. While nobody knows how long or dark that shadow may be, at least the clubs do understand about economic crises. One of the core reasons why the teams are all so evenly matched is because professional football in the country was forged during Japan's "Lost Decade" of the 1990s. Once the first flurry of big-name signings was over, sensible club management became deeply engrained in the system.

It's a different story with the sponsors, however.

Toyota (Grampus) are anticipating a net group loss of £5.3billion for the year to March; Nissan (Marinos) are counting £2.04bn in losses; Hitachi (Reysol) reported a net loss of £2.84bn in the three months to December alone; Panasonic (Gamba) will report a consolidated net loss of over £2.3bn for the 2008 financial year; Mitsubishi Motors (Urawa Reds) face £461million in losses. And so it goes on.

Sense of doom

But it is still far too early for a sense of doom, if not gloom. Trinita, for example, have managed to raise their modest wage bill by 10 per cent (to roughly £8.5m) to keep the team together and challenge for the top.

And it must also be pointed out that a league which started with 10 clubs in 1993 now has 36 in two divisions, the average top-flight attendance last year was 19,278 – which is well up with many of the world's top leagues – and there are some very promising young players coming through, including Atsuto Uchida (Antlers), Michihiro Yasuda (Gamba), Yuto Nagatomo (FC Tokyo) and Masato Morishige (Trinita).

This could even be the year that the J.League starts to become an Asian Super League because it has adopted the AFC's 3+1 foreigners model to allow each club an extra foreign player from an AFC member association. Mind you, if the planners were hoping for an immediate influx of Saudis, Iranians and Australians they will have been very disappointed. All it has done so far is open the door to more tried-and-trusted Koreans.

Crunch tackle...sponsors of J.League clubs have been hit hard

> "The other big element of uncertainty is off the field in the shape of the global financial crisis"

Antlers and Gamba, always two of the wisest clubs in the transfer market, have both addeded Koreans to their squads, with Park Joo-Ho from Mito HollyHock being Antlers' first-ever non-Brazilian foreign player. Omiya Ardija have brought in two players from Korea (though one is Croatian) and a Korean manager, Jang Woe-Ryong; Kyoto Sanga have acquired two Koreans – one from the North and one from the South; and Marinos have signed two Koreans while neglecting to find players from anywhere else.

The first division also welcomes a debutante this season in Montedio Yamagata. A small club located in a northerly basin renowned for heavy snow – and mountain gods, hence the name – their big achievement was to get promoted in the first place and this season it is all going to be about staying up. To help, they have acquired Kim Byung-Suk from Vitoria Setubal and, on loan, Andre Silva from Sociedade Esportiva do Gama and Francisco from Cruzeiro. ●

See page 101 for J.League 2009 preview

Meaning business...federation chairman Lowy, prime minister Rudd and AFC president Bin Hammam at the 2008 FIFA Congress

Serious players

The future looks bright for Australia's long-suffering football fans

AUSTRALIA

LES MURRAY in SYDNEY

IN THE SAME week that the fourth season of Australia's A-League reached its climax with the showpiece Grand Final between Melbourne Victory and Adelaide United, Football Federation Australia moved offices.

The common timing of the two events is not entirely coincidental nor insignificant.

As the gathering fans prepared for the big game – in the end a near-capacity 53,000 packed Melbourne's Telstra Dome – the FFA was settling into its new abode, forced to do so by the galloping momentum of the game's expansion. It needed bigger offices to house more staff, more desks and more computers, so that the administrative needs of football's accelerating growth and ambition in the country could be met.

When FFA chairman Frank Lowy and the country's prime minister, Kevin Rudd, sat down to the pre-game dinner at the Telstra Dome, it is likely that the conversation was not about who was likely to win the Grand Final and why, but about Australia's daring bid to host the World Cup in 2018.

Three months earlier Rudd had pledged the government's underwriting of the bid to the tune of £20million, not a risk-free thing to do for a national leader during a global economic downturn. But such are the persuasive powers of Lowy, Australia's richest man, and such is football's new reality in Australia that its prime minister, who grew up on rugby in his native state of Queensland, has a razor-sharp understanding of the benefits hosting a football World Cup will bring to the country.

It is now over five years since Lowy, at the invitation of then prime minister John Howard, took over the game's governance and triggered a transformation that has taken football from being a broke and pitiful backwater of Australian sport to a serious player; not just on the Australian landscape but increasingly internationally too.

> "Such is football's reality that the Prime Minister, who grew up on rugby, has a razor-sharp understanding of the benefits hosting a World Cup will bring to his country"

In that time the professional A-League was launched, Guus Hiddink was hired to successfully steer the Socceroos into the 2006 World Cup and Australia, thanks largely to a personal accord between Lowy and Asian football chief Mohamed bin Hammam, were admitted to the Asian Football Confederation.

More recently Sydney hosted the 2008 FIFA Congress (the official launch at the Sydney Opera House had to be seen to be believed), Australia are serious bidders to stage the 2018 World Cup and clear favourites to host the 2015 Asian Cup.

Not bad for a country whose football was on the brink of receivership just six years ago, languishing in the pecking order beneath half-a-dozen more popular sports, and so poor that its representative players were asked to pay their own air fares to travel to an international tournament.

The national team remains the primary driver of football's growth in popularity in a country that is besotted with its sporting teams and with international sporting success.

The pattern set by Hiddink, under whom Australia reached the second phase of the World Cup finals in 2006 only to lose to Italy by a last-minute penalty, continues. The Socceroos are galloping towards a berth in next year's World Cup, comfortably leading their group with four games still to play, and three of them at home.

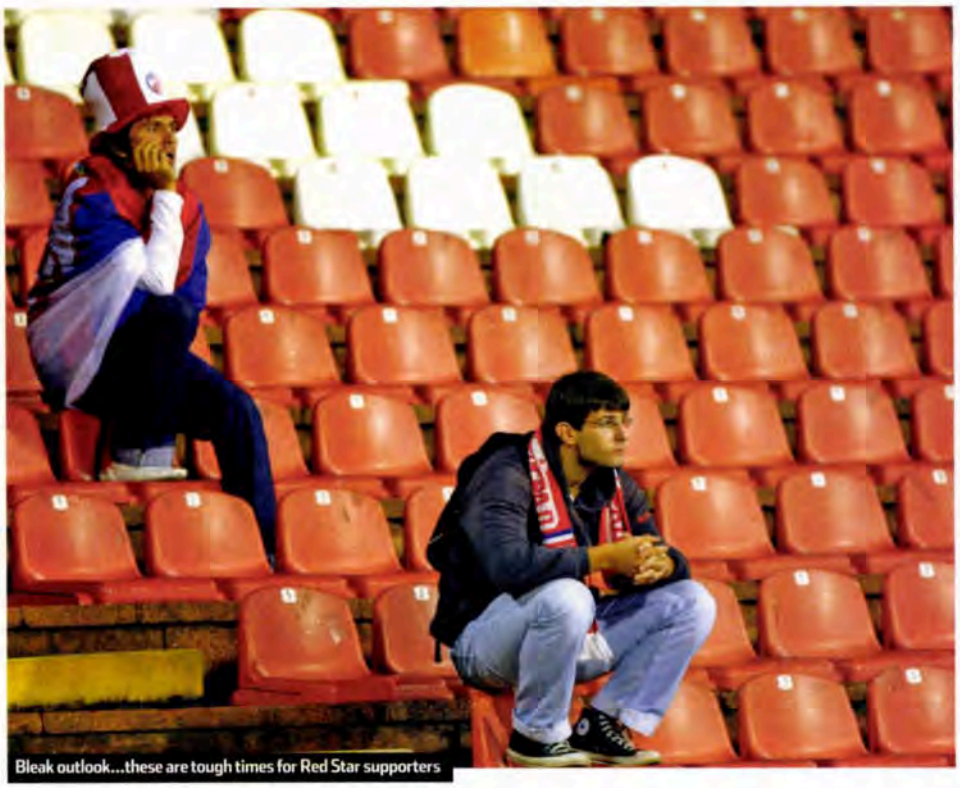
In charge is Pim Verbeek, assistant to Hiddink during his celebrated reign with South Korea, and under whom Australia have won eight and lost just two out of 15 matches since he took over in December 2007.

Verbeek leads a profoundly Dutch technical revolution, steered by his countrymen in every major technical post: national technical director, national youth coach, technical director of refereeing, as well the national coach and his assistant.

With that regime, affectionately dubbed the "Dutch mafia", it is not just the pointy end of Australia's football tree, the Socceroos, receiving attention but also the greater need to produce quality players for the future.

The future looks bright for Australia's long-suffering football fans who, until the Lowy-led revolution of 2003, bore their affection for the world game almost with embarrassment. ●

A-League season review, see page 90


Bleak outlook...these are tough times for Red Star supporters

Belgrade blues

Red Star, the country's biggest and most successful club, are facing the biggest crisis in their history

SERBIA

VLADIMIR NOVAK in Belgrade

RED STAR Belgrade president Dan Tana, who was elected just three months ago, was asked recently if he regretted taking up his new position. His response – "I regret it every day" – illustrates just how gloomy the situation has become at Serbia's most successful club, where the roll of honour includes 25 league titles and 22 domestic cups, not to mention the European Champions Cup and Club World Cup in 1991.

It is hard to know where to start when detailing Red Star's problems. Last season the club failed to win any domestic silverware, while in Europe they qualified for the UEFA Cup group stage but then finished with no points from four games.

This season things have continued to deteriorate and after a series of mediocre performances Red Star were third in the league, seven points behind leaders and arch-rivals Partizan. In this season's UEFA Cup they suffered a shocking exit in the second qualifying round to APOEL Nicosia – the first time in 13 years the club has failed at the preliminary stage in European competition.

If that didn't paint a bleak enough picture, sporting failure has been accompanied by poor management and turbulent leadership off the pitch. In the past five years Red Star have had no less than four presidents, five general secretaries and four sports directors, while coaches have been changed with alarming regularity: current head coach Cedomir Janveski is the club's sixth boss in two years.

> "Sporting failure has been accompanied by poor management and turbulent leadership"

Adding to the embarrassment, former president and club legend Dragan Dzajic was arrested last year, along with former club officials Vladimir Cvetkovic and Milos Marinkovic, and accused of fraud and misuse of power over transfer fees.

Red Star's position has been compounded by serious financial problems. Many quality players – Nemanja Vidic, Nikola Zigic, Bosko Jankovic, Aleksandar Lukovic, Nenad Kovacevic, Vladimir Stojkovic and others – have been sold for good money, but according to official data the club's debts stand at £14.2million. Money is owed to former players, ex-coaches, agents and other clubs; even the salaries and bonuses for the current squad are paid in arrears.

Deepest crisis

All these problems have combined to produce the deepest crisis in Red Star's 64-year-old history.

Many believe the only way out of the current situation will be for the club to become a regulated private company, ending the arrangement where the likes of Red Star and Partizan have operated as private clubs with huge influence being exerted by individual club bosses.

"People who started guiding the club knew little," says Dobrivoje Jankovic, the doyen of Serbian football journalists. "Those people are immature and ignorant.

"To lead Red Star is a big obligation. Not everybody can do it. It's not a club for experiments."

The conspiracy theorists have suggested that the downfall of Red Star is simply a ploy to decrease the club's market value, easing the way for a takeover by Miroslav Miskovic, the richest man in Serbia.

Allegedly there is a plan to knock down the stadium (the famous Belgrade Marakana) and develop the land as a shopping mall, with a new ground being built near Belgrade airport. It may sound fanciful but Miskovic's son, Marko, has strong links to the club.

Meanwhile Serbians can only hope that *Crvena Zvezda* (the original name in Serbian), a club with millions of fans throughout Serbia, the former Yugoslavia and across the region, can somehow find their way back to where they belong. ●

AaB on the up

Champions' UEFA Cup surge is a boost for Superliga

REIGNING LEAGUE champions AaB Aalborg gave Danish club football its best night since Brondby reached the semi-finals of the UEFA Cup way back in 1991 when they knocked out Deportivo La Coruna 6-1 on aggregate in this season's competition.

AaB won 3-0 at home in the first leg and then 3-1 away in Spain to deliver an extraordinary start for new manager Magnus Pehrsson, the little-known Swede who was a surprise choice for the job.

Critics had savaged AaB for their appointment of the 33-year-old, who had only one average season with Swedish club GAIS to his name. Moreover, the extremely popular caretaker coach Allan Kuhn had been unbeaten in 12 matches following the sacking of previous boss Bruce Rioch last autumn.

It did not seem a recipe for success, and there was also the fact AaB had not played a competitive match for more than two months due to Danish football's winter hibernation. Deportivo were also on the rise in La Liga.

But Anders Due scored twice in the home leg, with a Michael Jakobsen penalty allowing Aalborg a strong lead for the return match. Three goals in eight magical minutes just before half time of the second leg ensured a fairy-tale triumph. On-loan Jamaica striker Luton Shelton scored the first, followed up by strikes from Andreas Johansson and Thomas Enevoldsen.

AaB goalkeeper Karim Zaza claimed the credit should go to Pehrsson, saying: "Tactically, he is a fantastic coach. Against Deportivo his tactics were a total success. The plan was for us to be compact on the pitch and stop them creating chances. Then we scored so many goals ourselves – and I bet not many people were expecting that."

No, they weren't. But it was a thrilling indication that standards are rising in the Superliga, a point emphasised by national coach Morten Olsen, who has also overseen a fine start to World Cup qualification.

"Pehrsson is a fantastic coach. His tactics were a total success"

AaB keeper Karim Zaza sings his coach's praises after the win over Deportivo

"It was a fantastic performance in both legs by AaB," said Olsen. "They were particularly good at dead-ball situations, which are so important in modern football. It's wonderful for Danish football that one of our clubs can get such a good result and by playing so well. There was no luck about it. They have a real chance of beating Manchester City in the next round and reaching the quarter-finals."

The prize for victory over the English Premier League club would not just be Aalborg's; it would also ensure the Superliga receives an extra Champions League place for next season.

Manchester City had to overcome another Danish side, FC Copenhagen, to progress in the competition. Copenhagen lost 4-3 on aggregate, but their performance was another illustration of the improving strength of the Superliga, which resumed at the beginning of March.

Leaders Brondby started with a new manager following the arrival of Kent Nielsen from AC Horsens in a move arranged six months ago. There was no little irony that Nielsen had jumped from the club bottom of the Superliga to the one at the top.

It's all set for a close battle for the title between Brondby, Copenhagen and OB Odense, with just four points separating the three at the restart. ●

Riazor-sharp Danes...AaB celebrate Andreas Johansson's goal in the second leg in La Coruna

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Svent force?

Sven Goran Eriksson's days as Mexico national coach could be numbered following another defeat by the United States

WHEN SVEN GORAN Eriksson was appointed Mexico coach last year the critics feared he would not have enough time to get to know the idiosyncrasies of the country's football or prepare himself for the difficulties of the region's World Cup qualifiers.

Jared Borgetti, the country's record international goalscorer, said at the time: "It has to be someone who knows Mexican football, who knows the Mexican players, the lives of the Mexican players, and who knows the CONCACAF World Cup qualifiers, which are very different from Europe."

Barely nine months later and Borgetti appears to have been spot on. Eriksson has failed to rid Mexico of their inferiority complex when facing arch rivals the United States and, with his team only reaching the fourth and final CONCACAF qualifying phase for South Africa on goal difference, the 61-year-old has appeared perplexed by some of the goings-on around him.

His latest blow was February's 2-0 defeat to the USA in wet and windy Columbus, a venue chosen by the North Americans because it has one of the lowest concentrations of Mexican immigrants in the country.

Defeat has increased concerns that they might not qualify for the World Cup finals – something that last happened in 1982 when El Salvador and Honduras represented the region. It was also the fifth time in a row that Mexico have failed to beat the US and their 11th successive game without an away win against their neighbours.

It was all too familiar for Mexico as they went behind to a goal from a set piece, Rafael Marquez lost his temper and was sent off (as he was in the 2002 World Cup match which the US also won 2-0), and Oswaldo Sanchez was at fault for one of the goals. And then there was the scrap in the players' tunnel after the Mexicans accused the USA team of "over-celebrating".

Eriksson later got the dreaded vote of confidence from the national teams committee, which is headed by Guadalajara owner Jorge Vergara – the man behind his appointment.

"Sven cannot have his head on a guillotine. He has to work with confidence and we are giving it to him. We are not threatening him," said Justino Compean, president of the Mexican federation.

The next two qualifiers – at home to Costa Rica, who in 2001 became the first team to win a World Cup qualifier at the Azteca, and away to Honduras, who have already beaten Mexico in an earlier stage of the competition – are now vital. Failure in those two games could prompt the federation to change their minds: a choice they might find more tempting now that former national coach Javier Aguirre has left Atletico Madrid.

Mexico made a good enough start under Eriksson, reeling off home victories against Honduras, Jamaica and Canada in their early qualifiers. But things went wrong on their travels.

They were out muscled by Jamaica in Kingston, held 2-2 by Canada in Edmonton and beaten 1-0 by Honduras in San Pedro Sula. Friendly defeats against Chile and Sweden have only worsened the situation.

Other interests

It must be pointed out, however, that the Mexican national team is not an easy place to work. The federation is highly influenced by the Televisa and Azteca networks, but there are also other interests at work.

"There will be ghosts who will try and bring him down," warned the respected columnist Hector Huerta in a fascinating piece written shortly after Eriksson's appointment.

"He doesn't have the blessing of a group of [club] owners who had other candidates, nor of the leadership of the players' agents in Mexico...They will put pressure on Eriksson to select their players by way of "friendly" journalists. Neither does he have a group of trustworthy Mexican assistants who will clearly explain to him about Mexican players whom he doesn't know."

"I think that if they have quality and a Mexican passport they have to be in the Mexican national team. Nobody told me this is prohibited"

Eriksson has been criticised for calling up "foreigners"

The Swede has also found himself in the middle of the row over naturalised players which came to a head when he picked four "foreigners" in his squad for the friendly against Sweden, calling up Argentina-born Matias Vuoso and Lucas Ayala, and Brazil-born Antonio Naelson ("Sinha") and Leandro Augusto.

Even Guillermo Ochoa, his own goalkeeper, questioned the choice. "It's a very delicate situation, there are a lot of Mexicans waiting for a chance in the national team and this makes it more and more difficult for them," said Ochoa.

A bemused Eriksson replied: "I think that if they have quality and a Mexican passport they have to be in the Mexican national team. Nobody told me this was prohibited.

"It's a little bit difficult for me to understand all this. If I don't select Vuoso or Naelson, they criticise me; if I pick Lucas Ayala, they criticise me."

Eriksson was equally baffled to find himself under fire for leaving out Cuauhtemoc Blanco, even though the fiery forward had announced his international retirement after winning what he claimed was his 100th cap at home to Canada (though FIFA said it was officially his 97th). Whatever the figure, he played for two minutes and still got booked for diving.

"I find it a little strange that a player says one day that he doesn't want to play in the national team for a number of reasons, then tells the media that he's available," he added.

If that is not enough, Eriksson has found himself short of international-class players and against the US he was forced to call up several forwards – Omar Blanco, Giovani Dos Santos, Nery Castillo and Guillermo Franco – who, for various reasons, have seen almost no recent action with their respective European clubs.

South Africa, it seems, is a very long way away. ●

Cup setback...Pavel Pardo (left) and his Mexico team-mates were bought down to earth by Clint Dempsey and the US

Window dressing

The second half of the Czech league season began with clubs once again forced to cope with the loss of key players in the transfer window

IT IS A HARSH reality of the economic climate in Czech football that the country's top clubs know many of their best players will leave every six months.

Unable to match the salaries or ambition of their western neighbours, the Czech league's leading teams have done a surprisingly good job of patching their sides back together following these exoduses in the past.

Relative to its size, the Czech Republic remains a prodigious producer of young footballing talent; but with the failure of any Czech club to reach the Champions League group phase or progress to the UEFA Cup knockout stage this season, there are concerns that the bottom of the barrel may be in sight.

In the past 18 months Slavia have seen a turnover of around 30 players, including the sales of Czech international forward Stanislav Vlcek to Anderlecht, midfielder Lukas Jarolim to Siena and striker Pavel Fort to Toulouse.

"I don't know whether that's a lot or a little, but I think the transfers have paid off for us," Slavia chairman Petr Dolezal told the *Mlada fronta DNES* newspaper in February, pointing out that his club won the League and reached the Champions League group phase last season.

This January's transfer window saw another flurry of activity. Along with 19-year-old Tomas Necid, the league's leading scorer who joined CSKA Moscow in a deal arranged over the summer, Slavia lost three key defensive players. Skilful Slovakia wing-back Matej Krajcik joined Reggina; defensive midfielder Mickael Tavares, who was picked up from French side Tours in 2007, was sold to Hamburg for a handsome profit; and former Birmingham City defender Martin Latka moved to Greek side Panionios.

Following the latest departures, Slavia, as usual, looked to their smaller domestic rivals for replacements, bringing in Petr Trapp from Viktoria Plzen as a replacement for Tavares and defender Josef Kaufman from Teplice to take Krajcik's role. Less predictably, they also signed defender James Dens from Brazilian side J.Malucelli and brought in out-of-contract Latvian goalkeeper Deniss Romanovs as a back-up for Martin Vaniak

As a replacement for Necid, Slavia have looked to the past, re-signing 19-year-old Tomas Pekhart on loan from Tottenham Hotspur and bringing back Fort on loan from Toulouse. Ales Besta, signed from Brno, is another option up front.

As well as integrating the new players, coach Karel Jarolim also had to deal with several injuries as the spring campaign got under way. With central defenders Marek Suchy and David Hubacek struggling for fitness, and new signing Kaufman requiring a cartilage operation, a defence significantly weakened during the transfer window was left looking particularly threadbare.

Only consolation

Perhaps Jarolim's only consolation was the knowledge that his main title rivals faced similar problems.

Mlada Boleslav, who ended the autumn six points behind Slavia in second place, are without key midfielder Jan Rajnoch following the 27-year-old's departure for German side Energie Cottbus. As a replacement for Rajnoch, whose performances earned him a first call-up to the Czech national team last August, Boleslav signed youngster Ondrej Kudela from Sparta Prague.

Farewell...Matej Krajcik has left Slavia for Italy's Reggina

> "There are concerns that the bottom of the barrel may be in sight"

Third-placed Banik Ostrava also lost their biggest star in the transfer window, selling Czech international striker Vaclav Sverkos to French side Sochaux. Veteran defensive midfielder Tomas Galasek also moved on, joining Borussia Monchengladbach.

The upheaval at Sparta has largely been the result of new coach Jozef Chovanec wielding the axe following a disappointing autumn campaign. But while midfielder Petr Vorisek's loan move to Austrian side Altach and forward Libor Dosek's departure to Skoda Xanthi of Greece were part of the clean-out, striker Miroslav Slepicka's move to Dinamo Zagreb will be more keenly felt.

Elsewhere, Teplice's on-loan forward Tomas Jun has joined Vorisek at Altach, and a trend for western clubs snapping up promising Czech teenagers continued with 18-year-old defender Milan Misun joining Scottish side Celtic from Pribram. ●

Cheats prosper

FIFA is turning a blind eye to African countries who are 'buying' their own national teams

WITH A POPULATION of just over 500,000 and a landmass of less than 30,000 sq km, Equatorial Guinea is among Africa's smallest countries. Decades of tyrannical rule have also made it among the most isolated – until the recent discovery of oil and a sudden cash injection.

Some of this windfall has trickled down to football, so much so that Equatorial Guinea has been able to virtually buy its own national teams.

Despite the small size of the country, they are newly crowned Africa's women champions, courtesy of a contingent of paid mercenaries from Brazil.

That they were able to overcome Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa speaks not of an incredible fairytale feat but the dangers of the unchecked nationality cheating that is growing in African football.

In the men's game, the recent first phase of African World Cup qualifiers saw Equatorial Guinea field a host of Brazilians. Other countries such as Mauritania, Niger and Rwanda also hand out passports to players. This is in contravention of FIFA rules, yet the Confederation of African Football (CAF) has chosen to turn a blind eye.

Indeed FIFA also seems to apply its rules selectively, going after Qatar a few years ago in similar circumstances because it was a high-profile case but not dealing with African countries well off the world spotlight.

Brazilian coach Antonio Dumas began the hiring of players from his native country when he was in charge of Togo in 2003. Countries who competed against them in the African Nations Cup qualifiers complained to CAF but, incredulously, it refused to take any action against six Brazilians who flew in to play for Togo in international encounters.

Having got away with it once, Dumas repeated the deceit when he took charge of Equatorial Guinea soon after. Equatorial Guinea have also handed nationality with improper haste to players from Cameroon, Liberia and Senegal.

The Brazilian mercenaries continued to play throughout the 2010 World Cup qualifiers, long after Dumas had been fired – goalkeeper Danilo, for example, playing all six group games. He is a 27-year-old journeyman from Caruaru, now playing at Deportivo Sergipe in the third level of competition in Brazil and has only ever been to Africa to play international football.

> **"Brazilian coach Antonio Dumas began the hiring of players from his native land when in charge of Togo. Having got away with it, he repeated the deceit with Equatorial Guinea"**

Rwanda, incredibly, were allowed to play Angolan-born Joao Elias, a political refugee from Belgium, at the 2004 Nations Cup finals, where he scored a cracking goal in the opening match against hosts Tunisia. Elias' only connection with Rwanda was the fact his team-mate at Belgian club Mechelen, Desire Mbonyabucy, had recruited him to the cause.

Hire at will

Rwanda have continued to hire outside talent at will and go unchallenged by those tasked with upholding the sanctity of the game.

Key to their surprise berth in the last 20 of the African qualifiers for the 2010 World Cup finals are players such as Mafisango Mutesa (born in the Congo), fellow defender Boubakary Sadou from Cameroon and new strike sensation Labama Bokota, who hails from DR Congo. There is even the absurdity of Manfred Kizito, hired from neighbours Uganda, and whose brother, Nestory, actually played in the World Cup qualifiers for Uganda.

Mauritania lost all their recent World Cup qualifiers, failing to profit from the continued use of Frenchmen Dominique Gourville and Yohan Langlet, who were turned into instant internationals when their former club coach Noel Tosi took the Mauritania helm in 2003.

FIFA promised to clampdown on players claiming dual nationality to qualify for national team selection in March 2004 in the wake of a bid by Qatar to recruit the Bundesliga's top scorer Ailton, who had been ignored by his native Brazil.

Sepp Blatter took a principled stand when the Ailton controversy broke but his organisation has done little since to enforce it.

In order to qualify for international football players must be born in the territory of the relevant team, have a biological parent or grandparent from that territory, or have lived continuously in the country for at least two years.

Or, as in the case of Africa, you can always just slip over the border or fly in from Brazil. ●

Foot in the door...Angola-born Joao Elias (right) was allowed to played for Rwanda in the African Nations Cup

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25 Stars World

Over the next 10 pages, *World Soccer* writers select the players most likely to shine in South Africa next year

★ Kaka King of Brazil

AMID ALL THE January fuss surrounding the Manchester City bid, one factor was generally overlooked in Kaka's decision to stay with Milan: why would he want to rock the boat in the run-up to South Africa 2010?

If he takes care of himself – as he surely will – Kaka has a chance of playing the wise old head in the squad when the circus comes to Brazil in 2014. He will have turned 32 by then, and will inevitably have lost some of his physical capacity. But his intelligence, quality and experience could keep him in contention to round off his international career with a fourth World Cup.

But 2014 would be a bonus. In 2002 he was a youngster taken for experience, while 2006 is best forgotten. In South Africa, at his peak at 28, Kaka will hope to make his definitive statement as an international footballer – and Milan can help him do it. With their high-tech laboratory and super-scientific methods of physical preparation, the club have enjoyed a dramatic reduction in non-traumatic injuries and in use of medicines. Staying put was clearly Kaka's safest bet if he hopes to star in South Africa.

In 2006 Kaka wandered round Germany – and Switzerland where Brazil prepared for the World Cup – carrying a hand-held camera. He wanted to record and relive the whole experience. Glancing at the footage now must be like watching a personal video nasty. Brazil's much-hyped team never looked convincing. Kaka was man of the match and scored the only goal of the opening game against Croatia, but his performances got steadily worse. In the quarter-final, when Brazil were well beaten by France, he was hauled off after 78 anonymous minutes.

There was an obvious excuse. With Ronaldo and Adriano, plus himself and Ronaldinho, the team was top-heavy. Then-coach Carlos Alberto Parreira has since confessed that the attempt to fit so much attacking talent into the line-up caused him to contradict his own philosophy and select a team that was a throwback to 4-2-4. It obliged Kaka to keep tracking back far from the opposing goal and the workload proved too much.

Back then, sacrifices were necessary; it was Ronaldo's team. Now Kaka is king . In South Africa the team will almost certainly be set up so he can concentrate on what he does best – breaking forward with that combination of speed, power, intelligence and technical excellence that gives the impression football is an easy game.

Superb solo goal

The status of Brazil's leading player was not granted to Kaka on a silver platter. After the 2006 failure, Dunga took over on a "team before stars" ticket. The first time they worked together, a friendly against Argentina in London, he made a point of leaving Kaka on the bench. He came on in the second half to score a superb solo goal and was on target in three of the next five matches. With his Milan form twice confirming him World Player of the Year, there was no doubt Kaka had earned his place at the top of Brazil's pecking order.

of the next Cup

The only bump came when he pulled out of the 2007 Copa America. Dunga was displeased and the Brazilian FA published Kaka's request to skip the tournament on its website. This irritated the player, who felt an internal matter was unnecessarily being made public. Dunga made his point once more by relegating Kaka to the bench for the first friendly after the victorious campaign. But when the World Cup qualifiers started, Kaka was back with prestige intact.

Injury kept him out of four of the first 10 rounds, but he was still joint-top scorer (with Luis Fabiano) on four goals and his place as Brazil's most creative talent seems secure.

He was badly missed in a goalless draw with Argentina, a 2-0 loss to Paraguay and a dreadful goalless home draw with Bolivia but was outstanding in his last game, a 6-2 hammering of Portugal in November.

It is a sight that looks set to grace the fields of South Africa. And the 2010 version of Kaka's home movies could well make for happier viewing.

Tim Vickery

★ David VILLA

Valencia & Spain

WHO SAID Emilio Butragueno's 1986 World Cup feat of four goals for Spain against Denmark was a one-off most unlikely to be bettered? Such is David Villa's rare talent for finishing and prime-of-life confidence nobody would be stunned if the 27-year-old Valencia striker repeated the trick in South Africa.

Speedy, effervescent, intuitive, always first in the queue for a second helping of goals, Villa showed just what a handful he can be in his country's triumphant Euro 2008 campaign. A brilliant hat-trick in his side's first game, a 4-1 thumping of Russia, made him the first Spaniard to do so in European finals. And then there was an extraordinary late winner against Sweden, latching on to long ball, barrelling inside Petter Hansson and coolly slotting past Andreas Isaksson. "Almost impossible," was how coach Luis Aragones described the finish. It was no exaggeration.

Those four goals were sufficient for Villa to be crowned tournament top marksman. Unfortunately, his Austrian summer would not quite have a happy ending. During the finals build-up, he strained his right thigh and though the medical staff performed a minor miracle to have him ready for the big kick-off, he tore a muscle in the same thigh early in the semi-final victory over Russia. Adios Vienna, the Final and the chance to torment Germany's blockhouse centre-backs.

A role as spectator as Spain enjoyed their finest hour in three-and-a-half decades must have irritated this supreme competitor no end. The South African World Cup will be his opportunity to complete unfinished business.

The Spaniards certainly are blessed, with their inimitable strike tandem of Villa and Fernando Torres used to being the main men at club level but ready to put their egos to one side for Spain's cause. The formula for their co-existence is a simple but extremely effective one. Torres at the point of attack, Villa the charged electron buzzing around him, aiming to exploit the space between midfield and the opposition defence. At Euro 2008 their understanding was so well-honed they seemed connected by an invisible thread.

Once thought of as only comfortable on the break, Villa cannot be dubbed one-dimensional these days. Two-footed as well as strong in the air and a master of pulling off the shoulder of the last defender he can score in any circumstance. What is more, he can prosper in a 4-4-2, lead the line solo and even play as a false left-winger. You want blood? He can be a donor too, never afraid to tackle back and harass the man in possession.

Much water has flowed under the bridge since Villa was rejected as a youngster by Real Oviedo in his native Asturia. In the colours of Sporting Gijon, Zaragoza, Valencia and Spain, he has proved himself real value for money. And he now stands a lofty fifth in the national team's all-time scoring list with 25 goals in 42 games.

He could soon threaten the record mark of the eternal Raul (44) and that would be the irony of ironies. Aragones controversially jettisoned Raul in favour of Villa, who like his predecessor has a fetish for the No 7 shirt.

A more immediate question is where *"El Guaje"* (an Asturian name for kids who once worked in the local mines) will be playing next season. Valencia reportedly have rebuffed a number of stratospheric offers, including £40million from Chelsea, and his contract runs to 2014. But the club are in choppy financial waters and although Villa and Valencia have denied talk he is off to Real Madrid or Barcelona in June, we shall see.

Having given his name to an Iberian patisserie creation of banana, caramel, cream and chocolate, Villa is bound to be main course material in South Africa.

Nick Bidwell

"At Euro 2008 he and Torres seemed connected by an invisible thread"

★ Claudio BRAVO

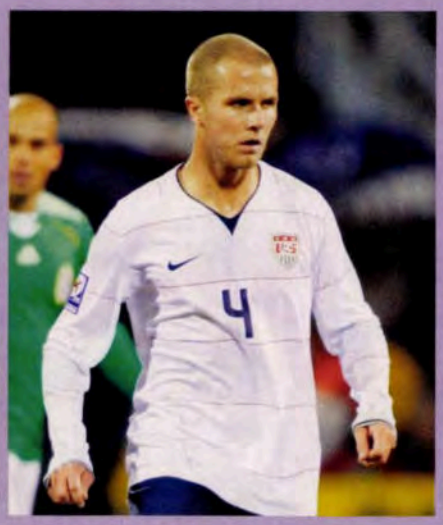
Real Sociedad & Chile

CHILE'S attacking approach means they win games – only Paraguay have won more qualifiers – but it can leave them open to the counter, as 3-0 home defeats by Paraguay and Brazil make clear. Their defensive solidity will be tested in South Africa, and Bravo has a vital role to play. He is a good shot-stopper, but is not the tallest of keepers in a team that lacks height. He will need to organise the defence at set-pieces and choose well when to come off his line. ***TV***

★ Bruno ALVES

Porto and Portugal

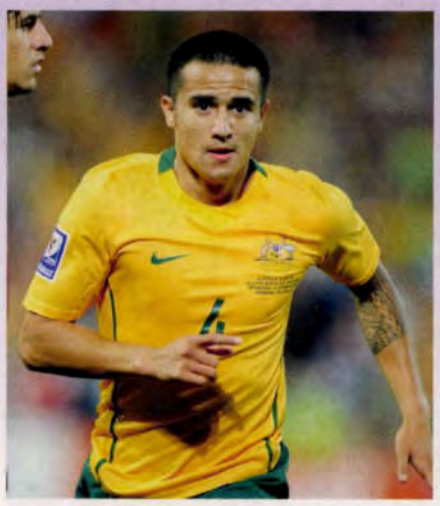
INDOMITABLE Portuguese centre-back Bruno Alves is an imposing and tenacious character who looks at losing out in any sort of duel as a personal affront. Strong in the air, quick to recover lost ground, he is also a real threat advancing at set-pieces. He must, though, strive to keep his agressive ways in check. Rumoured to be on his way to Barcelona. ***NB***



★ Michael BRADLEY

Borussia Monchengladbach & USA

DYNAMIC American midfielder who underlined his worth to his nation with two goals in a recent World Cup qualifying win over Mexico in Columbus, Ohio. Son of current US head coach Bob Bradley, he made his international breakthrough during the triumphant 2007 CONCACAF Gold Cup-winning campaign. With New York/New Jersey MetroStars and Heerenveen in Holland before joining Monchengladbach last summer. ***NB***



☆ Tim CAHILL

Everton & Australia

ARGUABLY the best attacking header of the ball in the Premier League and a master at sneaking forward from midfield into scoring positions. Cahill also has the ability to play as a pure front man, filling in effortlessly this season after Everton's strikers suffered a plague of injuries. As feisty and competitive as any sporting Aussie, he already has a World Cup pedigree, leaving the bench to score twice in a 3-1 win over Japan in Kaiserslautern in 2006. ***NB***

☆ Mbark BOUSSOUFA

Anderlecht & Morocco

THE BEST of the growing number of second-generation Moroccans born in Europe who are now dominating the national team squad. Boussoufa is from Amsterdam and spent time at Ajax and Chelsea before making his name in Belgium, first at Gent and now Anderlecht. He played less than 30 minutes in the first stage of the World Cup qualifiers because of injury but there is little doubt he will have a part to play as Morocco embark on the final phase.

Mark Gleeson

★ Steven DEFOUR

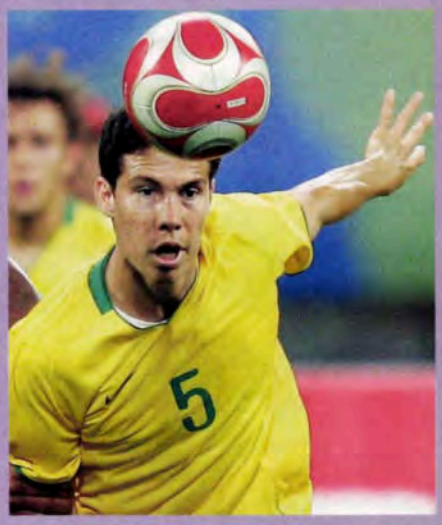
Standard Liege & Belgium

THE STANDARD skipper is one the principal reasons why Belgium are flowering again as a footballing force. Often compared to Wilfried Van Moer, the midfield fulcrum of *Les Diables Rouges* in the 1970s, Defour combines incisive passing, drive and irrepressible spirit. Belgium's Player of the Year in 2007, he has rejected the chance of a £15million move to Dynamo Moscow, no doubt preferring to save himself for when a Premier League club come calling, which they surely will. ***NB***

★ Patrick HELMES

Bayer Leverkusen & Germany

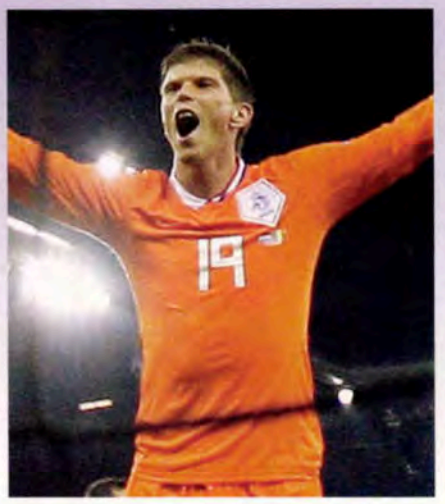
GERMANY, we have a problem up front. Lukas Podolski is out of favour at Bayern Munich, while Mario Gomez has proved unable to translate his prolific Bundesliga goalscoring touch to the international arena. Young Leverkusen striker Helmes could be the answer to partner Miroslav Klose. An excellent finisher with either foot, robust and – most crucially – confident, he is the son of former German pro Uwe Helmes, who played for Duisburg and Fortuna Koln. ***NB***



★ HERNANES

Sao Paulo & Brazil

HAS ONLY one brief appearance as a sub at senior level, but could break through to become a vital player in South Africa. The country of Didi, Gerson, Toninho Cerezo and Falcao has had a thin time of it lately in terms of central midfielders with a good range of passing. Hernanes, mobile and excellent with both feet, could be the solution. He's not there yet – he had some good moments but few good matches in last year's Olympics. But there's enough time for him to step up. ***TV***



☆ Klaas-Jan HUNTELAAR

Real Madrid & Holland

DISREGARD the problems he has had at Real Madrid following his £20million move from Ajax in January. As long as he has regular first-team football – whether at Real or in the Premier League, where he is reported to have friends in high places – and receives good service from the wings, he is a natural predator who will score any place, any time. ***NB***

☆ Milan JOVANOVIC

Standard Liege & Serbia

LIKE Steven Defour, this Serb striker has used Standard Liege as the platform to promote his international aspirations. Since making his full Serbia debut in June 2007 against Finland, he has proved just what the Belgrade doctor ordered, most elusive when running with the ball and composure itself in front of goal. Known in Belgium as "The Snake" for his brilliant dribbling. ***NB***

☆ Franck RIBERY

Bayern Munich & France

FRANCK RIBERY'S eagerness to shine on the big stage is working both for and against Bayern Munich as the former four-times European champions struggle to put their act back together under Jurgen Klinsmann.

The 25-year-old Frenchman scored two goals – one a superb solo, the other a penalty – and helped created another as Bayern put five past Sporting Lisbon in their Champions League clash in the Portuguese capital – just when speculation about the futures of both men was building up.

Klinsmann has not generated the spark Bayern fans expected though the management continues to insist, via chief executive Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, that this is merely "work in progress" and that the club has the patience to see through Klinsmann's two-year project.

Perceptions of its potential rest largely with Ribery's permanence at the club. He does not have a track record of loyalty. Ribery played for four French clubs in four years before moving to Galatasaray in 2005 and then walked out of the Istanbul club to join Marseille in protest at the delayed payment of his wages. He then transferred again in 2007 to Bayern.

In his first season, and despite Bayern's loss of their league title, he was acclaimed in Germany as both Footballer of the Year as well as Sports Personality of the Year.

Rumours arose about difficulties behind the scenes, however, after Ribery was given a public dressing down by Bayern grandees, such as president Franz Beckenbauer, Rummenigge and Uli Hoeness, for a penalty miss in the 5-1 cup win over Stuttgart.

Ribery had attempted a "Panenka kick", so-called after the soft, teasing penalty with which Antonin Panenka seized victory over West Germany for Czechoslovakia in the Euro 76 Final. He was upset at being criticised so publicly, particularly when Bayern had won the game so easily and said he was just having a bit of fun.

"I don't understand how people can be so fixated on one minor incident in a big win in which I played well, I scored a goal and I provided the assist for another goal," he said.

The sum total of minor incidents all hinted – certainly as far as Europe's big spenders are concerned – that the relationship between Ribery and Bayern might be heading for meltdown.

A sequence of league defeats – including potentially decisive ones in the title race against Hamburg and Hertha Berlin, and then home to Koln – were not helpful. Then along came Lisbon and the promise, at least, of a revival of Bayern's European prospects.

This is the big stage for Ribery year-in, year-out. His status with France is such that, minor issues such as fitness and qualification aside, he expects to be a high-profile figure for *Les Bleus* at the World Cup in South Africa next summer. But he wants to make the most of his career in between and Ribery has never been one to let the grass grow beneath his feet.

Ribery is aware of interest from Real Madrid, Barcelona, Chelsea and Manchester City. But he says: "I have a contract which runs to 2011 and I'm thinking only about seeing it through. As to whether I would want to leave, even a year early, I have to say this is not an issue about money, it's about where I am happy playing my football.

"So no one need have any worries that I will be leaving the Bundesliga. I am happy at Bayern, I like the fans and I believe they like me, too. This has always been uppermost in my mind despite all the recent talk."

Klinsmann, the day before the Lisbon game, went out of his way to assert that he expected Ribery to stick around for a long time. Bayern – and France – fans will hope this is more than merely wishful thinking.

Keir Radnedge

"I don't see how people can be so fixated on one minor incident"

Ribery was perplexed at being carpeted after failing with a "trick" penalty in a 5-1 win over Stuttgart

★ Amr ZAKI

Wigan & Egypt

SOME players just seem made for the big occasion, where high stakes bring out the gladiator in them. Egypt and Wigan striker Zaki is a case in point.

Egypt's domination of the last two African Nations Cups owes much to Zaki's flair for producing when it matters. Three years ago he came off the bench to grab a late winner in the 2-1 semi-final victory over Senegal, and he scored four more in the 2008 tournament, including two as the Pharaohs beat Ivory Coast 4-1 to secure their ticket to the Final.

Ivorian centre-back Kolo Toure of Arsenal must come out in a cold sweat recalling how Zaki ran rings around him that day. Toure has vast experience of World Cups and Champions Leagues but he simply had no answer to Zaki's power, single-mindedness and cute movement.

Zaki's international strike rate of 29 goals in 48 games speaks for itself. In his muscular frame, Egypt have a worthy successor to Hossam Hassan, an Egyptian legend who led the national team front line for over two decades.

Zaki is very much the complete attacker for the modern game. As he has more than demonstrated in the Premier League this season for Wigan Athletic, whom he joined last summer in a 12-month loan deal from Zamalek, he picks up momentum like a runaway truck, has a subtle touch on the ball, is strong in the air and has no problem shielding the ball with his back to goal. He clearly relishes the physical side of the game and Wigan chairman Dave Whelan has been happy to compare Zaki to former England, Blackburn and Newcastle striking legend Alan Shearer.

Unlike Shearer, though, Zaki can play much deeper. At the 2006 African finals he was used in the "hole" or as an attacking midfielder and very much looked the part, especially impressive with his laser-like long passes, such as the 50-yard inch-perfect ball which set up Hossam Hassan in the 4-1 quarter-final win against DR Congo.

A glaring miss against Manchester City, heading over with the goal at his mercy, was a moment he will find hard to live down and he has endured a mid-season slump – not unconnected to Wigan's January sale of fellow attacker Emile Heskey to Aston Villa. But on the whole, Zaki's time in the English Premier League has been a huge success – unlike his previous spell as a migrant. When he left ENNPI (the Egyptian Oil Company team) for Lokomotiv Moscow in 2006 he made next to no impact and was soon homeward bound.

Given Zamalek president Mamdouh Abbas' enraged resistance to Wigan's initial attempts to bring Zaki to England, the Lancastrian club can think themselves lucky to have struck any sort of deal at all. They would love to make the transfer permanent but Zamalek claim Wigan do not have first option on him and that any would-be buyers have to come through them. Admirers include Liverpool (Zaki hit two at Anfield this term), Valencia and Atletico Madrid.

"The time to talk about transfers will be at the end of the season," says Zaki. "Right now all I'm concentrating on is helping Wigan finish as high as we possibly can in the league. The rest can wait." ***NB***

"The time to talk about transfers will be at the end of the season"

Zaki is in no rush to secure a permanent move from Zamalek

☆ Seydou KEITA

Barcelona & Mali

THE NEPHEW of Salif Keita – the first African Footballer of the Year – was a teen prodigy, but after stagnating in France a move to Spain has realised his full potential. Barcelona paid £11million to Sevilla for his services and, while he is yet to nail down a regular place, he is a valued member of the Catalan club's squad. For Mali he is much more integral, the attacking foil to the patrolling prowess of Real Madrid's Mahamadou Diarra, and the supply line for Frederic Kanoute. *MG*

☆ Javier MASCHERANO

Liverpool & Argentina

ONE OF Diego Maradona's first tasks as Argentina coach was to persuade Mascherano to take on the team captaincy. "He's the Argentinian player who is closest to my way of thinking," said Maradona. "He cares about his team-mates, sacrifices himself, gives everything." He also balances the midfield; Maradona said his performance in the win over France "was close to perfection". *TV*

☆ Lionel MESSI

Barcelona & Argentina

IT IS inconceivable that Messi will suffer the same fate in this World Cup as he did in the last, when he was left kicking his heels on the bench as Argentina went out in the quarter-finals. Now so much more than just teenage promise, he will be 23 during the course of the tournament and is already established as his country's main hope in the quest to win their first World Cup in 24 years – the exact length of time it took Brazil to regain the trophy after the retirement of Pele. *TV*

☆ John Obi MIKEL

Chelsea & Nigeria

COLLECTIVELY Nigeria will always be contenders in the World Cup qualifiers, but the current generation of Super Eagles are devoid of any real stars and match winners – save for their midfield predator. He will be crucial to their chances as the likes of Nwankwo Kanu, John Utaka and Yakubu Aiyegbeni are playing diminishing roles these days. Was in trouble for ignoring Nigeria's Olympic campaign last year, but sanctions for skipping the event have been conveniently forgotten now that the 2010 World Cup qualifiers are at a crucial juncture. *MG*

☆ Riccardo MONTOLIVO

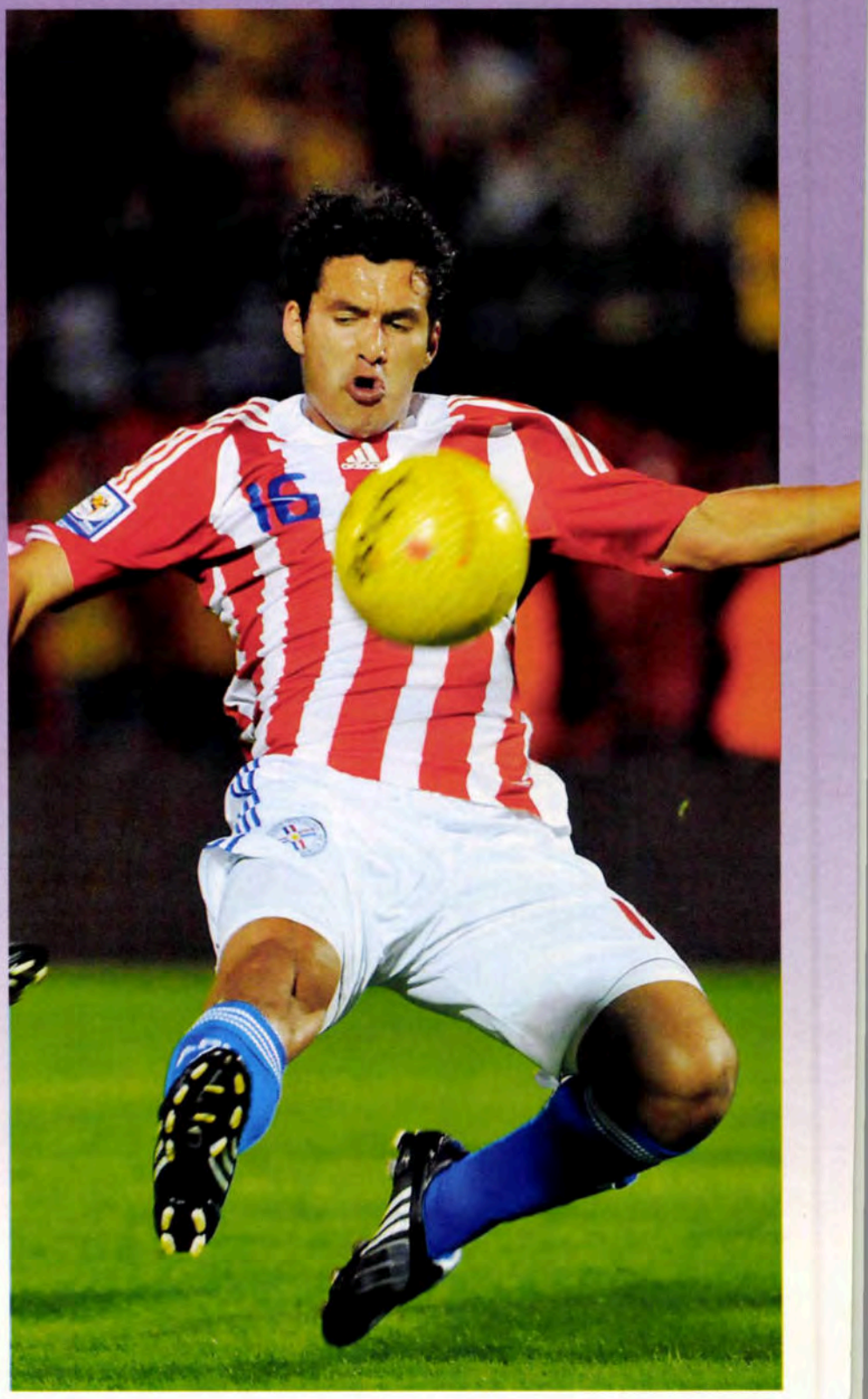
Fiorentina & Italy

CULTURED schemer at home on the left side of a midfield three or prompting in the "hole" behind the strikers. Italy bombed at Euro 2008 because of a monochrome creative department and *Azzurri* coach Marcello Lippi may see him as the player to provide some much-needed refinement and vision. Born in Italy, but his mother is German. *TV*

★ Theo WALCOTT

Arsenal & England

ONE OF England's most glaring failings in recent times has been a tendency to play at walking pace in wide attacking areas. But there should be no worries on that score if the speedy Walcott is unleashed on the right in South Africa. A magnificent hat-trick in a World Cup qualifying victory in Croatia last year was the moment his footballing life changed for ever, the day he went from national team super-sub to indispensable figure. ***NB***



☆ Cristian RIVEROS

Cruz Azul & Paraguay

DYNAMIC and versatile midfielder with eight goals in 36 games, three of them in the qualifying campaign. His bursts into the box are an important part of Paraguay's play, and he can finish in the air and off either foot. The successor to Carlos Paredes in the engine room. Paredes was never quite at his best in three World Cups and Riveros cut a timid figure in his first in Germany. More will be expected this time. ***TV***

★ Pavel POGREBNYAK

Zenit St Petersburg & Russia

AFTER being suspended for Zenit's UEFA Cup Final victory last season and missing Euro 2008 through a knee injury, he will be hoping to finally go global. The Spartak Moscow academy product's muscular physique, smooth technique, awareness and high strike rate should make Russia even more potent. ***NB***

★ Tatsuya TANAKA

Urawa Red Diamonds & Japan

DIMINUTIVE right-winger or striker with the sleight of foot and speed to tie a defence in knots. A ball of energy if ever there was one, the 26-year-old first appeared for the national team in 2005 but shortly afterwards broke his leg against China, an injury which kept him out for the best part of 12 months and sabotaged his claims for inclusion in the 2006 World Cup squad. ***NB***

★ Elrio VAN HEERDEN

Club Brugge & South Africa

INJURY has meant just a handful of substitute appearances for South Africa since he emerged as their best player at the 2008 African Nations Cup finals. Needed knee surgery at the start of the Belgian season but once back in action again emphasised his talent, notably on the wing and at set-pieces. ***MG***

☆ Roque SANTA CRUZ

Blackburn Rovers & Paraguay

A DECADE ago the beanpole striker looked on course to be one of the game's genuine superstars. He was leading his country's attack at the age of 17, then at Bayern Munich he suffered one injury after another. But in England he has stayed fitter and shown his undoubted class. If not a true great, he is a very good international centre-forward, and at the age of 28 his third World Cup could well be his best. ***TV***

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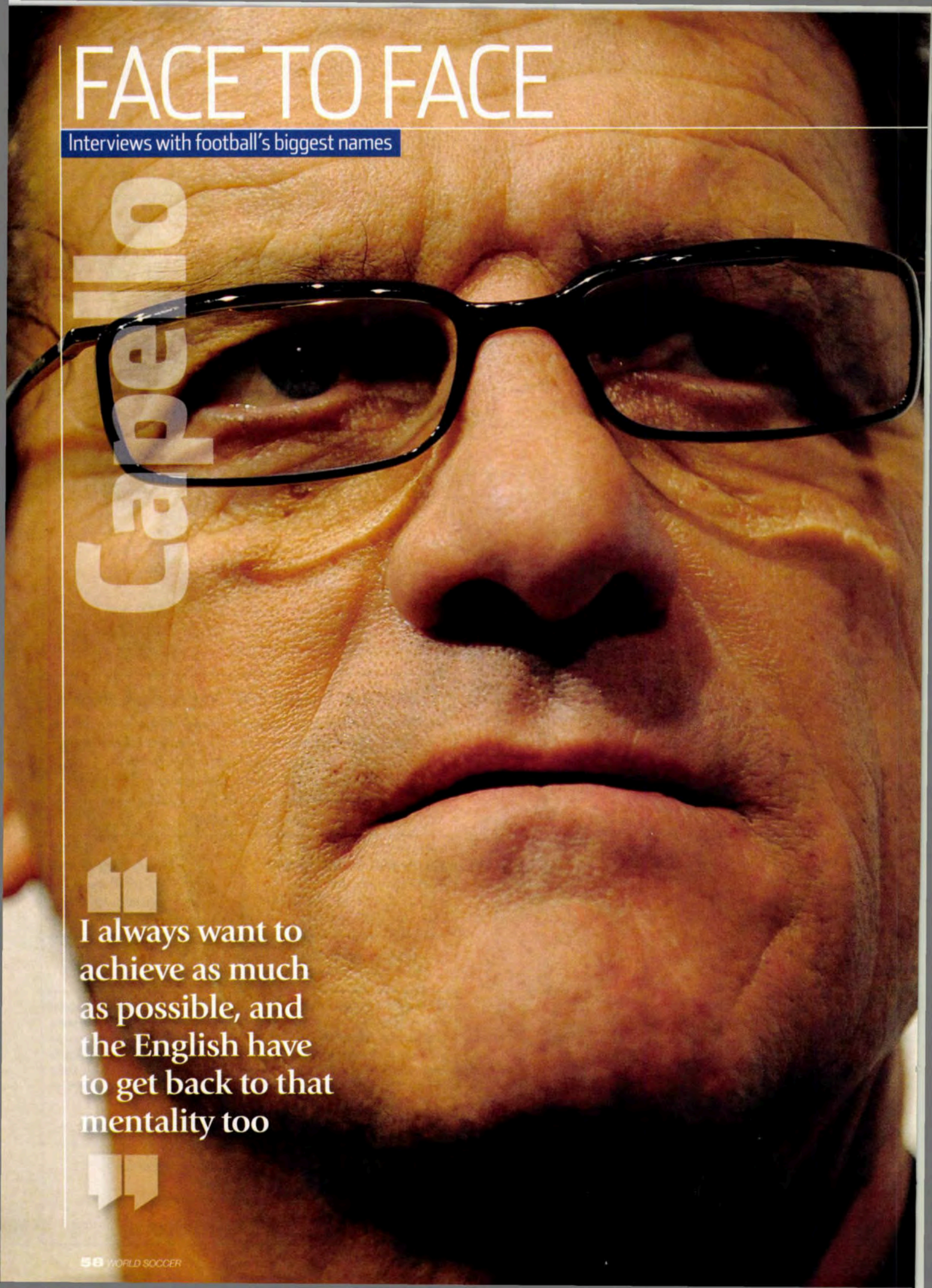
FACE TO FACE

Interviews with football's biggest names

Capello



"I always want to achieve as much as possible, and the English have to get back to that mentality too"

Fabio thoughts

The Italian reflects on his first year as England manager

HOW would you sum up your first 12 months as England coach?
It's all been very positive. The team has started its 2010 World Cup qualifying campaign in fine form, mainly due to the five warm-up matches we played against Switzerland, France, the USA, Trinidad & Tobago and the Czech Republic. Those games were vital for me to get to know my players – as well as their strengths and weaknesses – and for me to teach them my football philosophy and my views on attitude and conduct. We are bonding as a group but there is still room for improvement.

In which areas?
We have to rediscover the fighting spirit that English football has always been famous for. More importantly though, we have to get over this absurd fear of playing at Wembley, where criticism from the crowd has often paralysed the team in recent years. I can remember the "lion's roar" of Wembley, but recently that roar has turned into boos and moans because of the team's disappointing performances and results. We will play more attractive football when we have more confidence.

Many fans are already demanding that England reach the semi-finals, at the very least, of the World Cup in South Africa...
I have never set myself targets like that because I am not someone who is happy with half measures. I always play to win, as I proved at Milan, Real Madrid, Roma and Juventus. I want my players to have the same ambition. I always want to achieve as much as possible, and the English have to get back to that mentality too.

So where have you identified problems?
Unfortunately only 40 per cent of the players in the Premier League are English. That means that I have a smaller pool of players at my disposal. But fortunately they are of excellent quality. It is just a shame that players like Jamie Carragher and Paul Scholes have retired from international duty. I could certainly have used their experience.

Yet, on the other hand, you seem to be ready to do without Michael Owen, for example, one of England's leading lights in recent years...
I only ever call up the best players, or at least the players who are the most suited to the way I wish to play. I will never close the door to the national team on anyone, but you also have to remember that, in modern football, only players who are in peak physical condition can make the most of their technical abilities.

It also wasn't easy for you to pick a captain, apparently....
I have chosen John Terry for that position but Rio Ferdinand, his deputy, would also have been worthy of the honour. They play alongside each other in central defence, they are both leaders at their clubs – Chelsea and Manchester United respectively – they both have international experience and they are both born winners. I have always had captains with similar traits at centre-half – whether it was Franco Baresi, Paolo Maldini, Fernando Hierro, Walter Samuel or Fabio Cannavaro – defenders who can always read the game, influence their team-mates and set an example both and off the pitch.

What differences have you noticed between Italian, Spanish and English football?
In Italy it is all about tactics and playing for a result, whereas in Spain the focus is on technique and pace. In England the game is based on aggression and non-stop action. You can see the biggest differences in the stands though. In England you will find passion and safety. In Spain it's a huge family party. But in Italy the *ultras* terrorise everyone and everything, and sometimes they even tell the politicians and club bosses what to do. The "organised *tifosi*" have far too much power. It's an Italian phenomenon. In Italy crowds try to stop away teams getting to the stadiums, so instead they have to be driven straight to the dressing rooms in their team bus while being verbally abused and pelted with whatever people can lay their hands on.

Why did Spain win Euro 2008?
In the past Spain used to play on their *furia* – their fury – but they have now rediscovered the beautiful game. The national team have benefited from the fact that virtually every club in Spain uses the same system, one that is based on possession, technique and quick passing movements. The Spanish play quick passes along the ground because they do not conform to the stereotype of the modern footballer – Carles Puyol, Xavi Hernandez, Andres Iniesta, David Silva and David Villa are not what you would call "supermen". Winning the European Championship will have given this young team of players even more self-confidence, and this new generation is no longer divided by ancient regional rivalries and conflicts. Before the team was full of Castilians, Catalans and Basques, but now the players all feel Spanish.

What did Euro 2008 teach us?
There's hardly anything new to discover in football, but certain aspects can be reviewed and adapted to meet current trends. Every team, no matter what formation they use, actually have a system that I call the "9-1" formation. By that I mean that nine players primarily have defensive duties, and up front there is one lone striker who is supported by his team-mates rushing up to join him. The crucial difference often lies in the quality of the goalkeeper and the striker – Spain's Iker Casillas and Fernando Torres or Italy's Gianluigi Buffon and Luca Toni, for example. England also have good goalkeepers, but they always seem to have bad luck when they play for the national team and make mistakes in important matches.

So do you want to help England make progress in those areas?
Football always has to be a reflection of a country's culture. I don't want to change the characteristics and traits of English footballers, I just want to instil more discipline and teach them to work better as a team. Having said that, I do allow each player room to develop his own style within the role that I assign to him. I want to give England a little taste of Latin football from France, Italy Greece and Spain, and even from Portugal and Croatia, as all of these countries have dominated the European Championship and World Cup in the last 10 years, with the notable exception of the World Cup in 2002 when Brazil came out on top. English football has not just been about "kick and

rush" or "put the ball in the box" for many years now. I want a compact English team. Whether we win or lose, the most important thing is that we have a team on the pitch and not just a group of players.

So that's why the Football Association decided to employ a foreign coach?
Foreigners don't just make up 60 per cent of the players in the Premier League, the managers of the four leading clubs are also foreign. All four clubs have huge honours lists but England haven't won anything for nearly 50 years now. Nevertheless, it was important for me to have Ray Clemence and Stuart Pearce on my back-room staff, and I often have long discussions with Sir Trevor Brooking, the FA's technical director.

Why did you choose England?
It was a childhood dream of mine. For me, the English have always been the teachers of our sport, the ones who took the game to the rest of the world. In 2000, Howard Wilkinson, who at the time was England's interim coach, asked me whether I would be interested in taking over, but in the end the FA chose Sven Goran Eriksson. It wouldn't have been the right time for me anyway, but now I am eager and determined to help England rediscover the spirit that they once had as the teachers of football.

How is your English coming along? When you first took over, the media said you used swear words to talk to the players.
To be able to train a team you have to know the football jargon of that particular country. My English is good now and I'll soon be fluent. Apart from Italian, I also speak Spanish well and I have a working knowledge of both French and German. I don't read any newspapers whatsoever, regardless of whether my team wins or loses. I talk on a daily basis only to my colleagues and not to the press or the TV, but I know that I have the respect of the English media. I do not believe being England coach is quite the "mission impossible" that it is always made out to be.

Impressed...Walcott

Still learning...England's 2-0 loss in Spain was Capello first defeat in nine games

You have also ordered the English players to change their eating habits and some other routines...
That's true. I have, for example, impressed upon the players the advantages of a Mediterranean diet over ketchup and chips. I have also put some rules of conduct in place for when the national team meets up, from eating breakfast together to the use of mobile phones. The players have been very cooperative and that is a clear indication of the high level of professionalism at their clubs. Arsenal's academy, for example, is the perfect example of how young players should be brought along at all European clubs.

You also discovered Theo Walcott...
Eriksson had told me only good things about Walcott. He had taken him to the World Cup in 2006, don't forget, even though he didn't play, so I called him up to the squad and I was immediately impressed with his dribbling skills, his pace and his range of passes. At Arsenal he has a manager, Arsene Wenger, who can help him get even better. I have also seen a lot of good players in the England Under-21 side, and that fills me with great hope for the future.

Who are the best players you have ever played with or coached?
With Italy it was Gigi Riva and Dino Zoff. As a coach, I admired Marco Van Basten and Paolo Maldini for their talent, their professional attitude and their will to win.

Your contact runs until 2012, the year of the Olympic Games in London...
Yes. I will be 66 by then and I will have reached retirement age. Then I want to travel and visit all of the ancient cultures that fascinate me so much. But I would also like to make another of my dreams come true by taking part in the Olympic Games, something that I was denied as a player and something that still fills me with regret. I think it's only fair that Great Britain should have a football team in the Olympics, but it is up to others to decide how, and with which players.

Are you enjoying life in London?
I love it. My wife and I live in a flat in Belgravia. My office is at FA headquarters in Soho Square but I can't wait until we move to Wembley, which will be our new home. I am also looking forward to the new national football centre in Burton in Staffordshire. There is also so much culture for me to explore in London. My favourite places are the Barbican Centre, Sotheby's, the British Museum, the Tate Gallery and the Royal Albert Hall. There are also many excellent restaurants with cuisine from all around the world. There isn't exactly a shortage of golf courses for me to work on my new hobby either, and the weather is no worse than it is in Milan or Turin. I was born and brought up in Friuli, so I feel at home with a little bit of cold, rain and fog. ●

Interview by Sergio Di Cesare (courtesy of FIFA magazine)

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Fabregas future linked to Wenger

Thursday 5th March 2009

Arsenal skipper Francesc Fabregas has revealed his future with the club may be linked to that of manager Arsene Wenger.

The Spanish international has been a target for a number of leading European clubs, with Real Madrid and former employers Barcelona regularly linked with a move for the midfielder. more >>

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UP-AND

Mario BEEN

NEC NIJMEGEN

DURING A PLAYING career in which he pulled the strings in midfield for Feyenoord, Pisa, Roda, Heerenveen, Tirol Innsbruck and Excelsior Rotterdam, there seemed little chance of "Mariodona" ever taking up any sort of dug-out role. Too much the maverick, too ill-disciplined, too prone to playground pranks. However leopards can change their spots and Been the coach is a totally different footballing animal; an enthusiastic convert to the virtues of hard work, discipline, desire and team togetherness. In two-and-a-half years as coach of NEC, the 45-year-old has turned an unfashionable side into a well-organised, tenacious and effective outfit that is not devoid of flair. He has benefited enormously from an excellent management grounding, working as an assistant to current Holland boss Bert Van Marwijk at Feyenoord before joining Excelsior and leading them to the second division in 2005-06. However, his big test comes in July when he takes over at his beloved Feyenoord, who are in free fall this season.

Bulent UYGUN

SIVASSPOR

IN CHARGE OF this season's surprise Turkish Super League pace-setters, the 37-year-old was an attacking midfielder with Kocaelispor and Fenerbahce during his playing days and became famous for celebrating his goals with a military salute. Only time will tell if he and his side are still standing to attention come the end of the current campaign. But even if the provincial club do come up short in the title race, he can be proud of what he has achieved since switching from general manager to head coach in 2007. Certainly Sivasspor are no one-season wonders and last term they finished a very creditable fourth. A respected schoolboy wrestler, his approach to tactical matters is definitely not of the "two falls or a submission" variety and every game is meticulously prepared for. He is also highly adaptable and always looking for new sources of inspiration – one moment doorstepping Turkey coach Fatih Terim to seek his insight and secrets, the next asking a basketball coach for his ideas on zonal defence. He won 11 caps for Turkey and was the league's top scorer in 1993-94 with 22 goals for Fenerbahce.

Diego CAGNA

TIGRE

NO WONDER MANY in Argentina believe the 38-year-old will become national team coach one day. At Club Atletico Tigre, his first posting as a coach, he has worked no fewer than three miracles: promotion to the top flight in 2007, opening championship runners-up in 2007 and joint-top in the 2008 opening championships (before finishing second in a three-way play-off). While other Argentinian clubs have players of great renown, Cagna has assembled a real team from much less expensive material. In Tigre's home town of Victoria, to the north of Buenos Aires, he is considered a supreme motivator, a good judge of talent and character, and an astute field general. A fine defensive midfielder in his day, he was good enough to win 19 caps for Argentina and helped win the 1992 Confederations Cup. He played for Argentinos Juniors, Independiente, Boca Juniors, Villarreal in Spain and Mexico's Atletico Celaya, but despite his ties with Boca (who he helped win the Libertadores and World Club Cups in 2003) he now admits to having been a River Plate fan since his childhood and rumours abound that he could end up there soon.

COMING COACHES

Bruno LABBADIA
BAYER LEVERKUSEN

AFTER PROVING HIMSELF a team leader of great promise with second division Greuther Furth, the former Kaiserslautern, Bayern Munich and Germany striker (two caps) was headhunted by Leverkusen director of sport Rudi Voller last summer and has wasted little time in turning an extremely young side into strong contenders for a top-four finish. Logically, given his past as a marksman – he is the only player ever to have scored 100 goals in both of Germany's top two divisions – he sees attack as the best form of defence and his sides are always pleasing on the eye thanks to their swashbuckling style and high-octane combination play. An industrious, never-say-die type of forward, the 43-year-old is a true taskmaster on the training ground, often planning three sessions per day, with the first beginning at 7.45am. The only blemish on his report this term is Leverkusen's penchant for throwing away leads and an inability to kill teams off when they have them on the ropes.

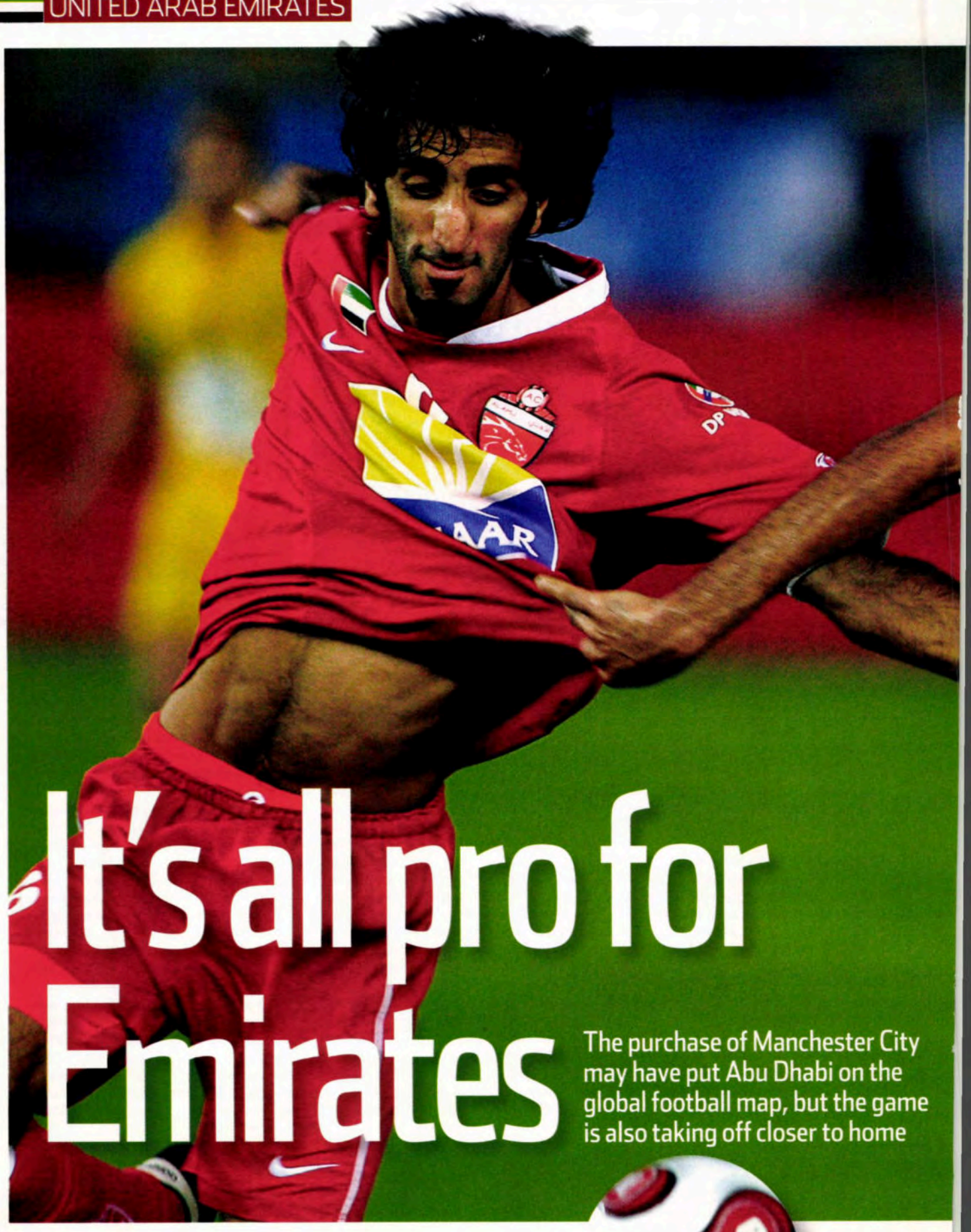
Gian Piero GASPERINI
GENOA

SINCE ARRIVING IN Genoa from second division Crotone in 2006 he has worked wonders, guiding the *Rossoblu* to promotion to Serie A in 2007 and making them elite big hitters. He does not particularly like talking about qualifying for the Champions League but it is a very real possibility. There is style as well as substance to his work and Genoa are arguably the most entertaining side in the peninsula at the moment. Other more established Italian bosses have tried and failed when using an attacking trident, but the 51-year-old has had no such problems with his 3-4-3: a formation spearheaded by chief goal threat Diego Milito, who is flanked by Bosko Jankovic of Serbia and Giuseppe Sculli. Juventus are a club close to his heart and he was a creative midfielder there in the 1970s, albeit on the first-team fringes. He was later in charge of Juve's youth team.

Unai EMERY
VALENCIA

IRREFUTABLE PROOF that a glittering playing CV is not necessary to run a big club. A creative midfielder with a sweet left foot, he spent most of his playing career in the lower reaches of Spanish football, turning out for Real Sociedad B, Toledo, Racing Ferrol, Leganes and Lorca. Yet his coaching career has been anything but modest. In 2004-05 he took little Lorca up to the second division and then came very close to securing what would have been a sensational upgrade to the Primera Division the following season. On moving to Almeria in 2006 he won immediate promotion to the top flight and a wonderful eighth-place finish last term. Now widely thought of as one of the most accomplished young bosses in the country, he signed a two-year contract last summer with Valencia, where he has wrought instant improvement. No repeat of last season's flirtation with relegation at the Mestalla stadium this time, just a concerted push for the Champions League. Described by friends as "football crazy", the 37-year-old combines naked ambition, single-mindedness, tactical savvy and natural charisma.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES



It's all pro for Emirates

The purchase of Manchester City may have put Abu Dhabi on the global football map, but the game is also taking off closer to home

ALEX KUNAWICZ in Abu Dhabi

SHEIKH MANSOUR Bin Zayed's investment in Manchester City and David Beckham's debut for Milan in Dubai both caught significant chunks of the media spotlight in recent months, but away from the glare lies a domestic game in the United Arab Emirates that continues to develop steadily, with governing bodies and government both playing their part.

Last May the UAE FA and Abu Dhabi Sports Council combined to impress FIFA enough for the capital to be awarded the Club World Cup for this year and next. With the winner of this season's domestic championship guaranteed entry to the competition – providing a UAE club does not win the Asian Champions League – this has offered a serious incentive for teams in the country's newly formed professional League, which is halfway through its inaugural season. As a warm-up event, FIFA's Beach Soccer World Cup will be hosted by Dubai in November.

The new league's formation mimics what has been happening around the rest of the continent as the Asian Football Confederation insists on raising standards, with leagues having to reach minimum professional criteria in order to gain places in the Asian Champions League.

The UAE League, under the guidance of Romy Gai, has performed well enough to guarantee the participation of three clubs (Al Shabab, Al Ahli and Al Jazira) in this year's competition, with a fourth (Sharjah) reached the group stage after winning a play-off.

The League had to put marketing strategies in place, sell television rights and charge admission for matches (something that had

Final showdown... Khaled Mohamed of Al Ahli (left) gets to grips with Alexander Olivera of Al Wasl in last year's President's Cup

never happened previously in the UAE), with all 12 clubs having to be run as businesses.

The Saudi broadcaster ART had made a bid for the League's TV rights but following a directive by Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed, president of the UAE, rights were granted to free-to-air local channels in a five-year deal worth £64.5million last July.

But while some things have changed, others remain the same, with the culture of going to a match yet to fully permeate the Emirati psyche. Attendances at games are often in the hundreds, although many fans watch matches at home and at shisha cafes.

Money no object...a suite at the Atlantis Palm Hotel in Dubai can cost as much as £13,000 a night

Stiff competition

The domestic game also faces stiff competition from the more glamorous foreign leagues. Italian games were the first matches from abroad to be shown live in the country so Serie A holds a special place in the hearts of many. Even more popular is the English Premier League, where the Dubai-based broadcaster Showtime offers all 380 games live.

With plenty of British influence in the region, football has grown in popularity over the years. When the UAE gained independence in 1971 its first domestic league began two years later, with the format and administration remaining virtually unchanged until the introduction of the AFC's new regulations last year.

On the international stage, Don Revie (who famously walked out on England), Carlos Alberto Parreira, Mario Zagallo, Valery Lobanovsky, Carlos Queiroz, Henri Michel, Jo Bonfrere, Roy Hodgson and Dick Advocaat are among those who have been in charge of the Emirates.

While Italia 90 may be remembered by most for "Toto" Schillaci, Roger Milla and Paul Gascoigne's tears, in the UAE it is celebrated as the country's debut appearance in the World Cup finals – which was no mean feat in an era when only two Asian teams qualified. Parreira's side lost 2-0 to Colombia, 5-1 to eventual winners West Germany and 4-1 to Yugoslavia.

Six years later the UAE, as hosts, made it to the Final of the Asian Cup only to lose 4-2 on penalties to Saudi Arabia after a goalless draw in Abu Dhabi. This remains their best performance in Asia's most prominent competition.

"Prejudices against local talent affects the national team"

UAE coach Dominique Bathenay is highly critical of the top-flight clubs' reliance on foreign players in key positions

Support...Mohamed Al Shehhi (left) celebrates with goalscorer Ismail Al Hammadi during the 4-1 World Cup qualifying defeat in South Korea

The Emirates' most recent success was enjoyed under Bruno Metsu, the Frenchman who led Senegal to the Final of the 2002 African Nations Cup and a famous victory over France at the World Cup finals that same year. He guided the UAE to victory in the 2007 Gulf Cup, with striker Ismail Matar scoring the winning goal in both the Final against Oman and the semi-final against Saudi Arabia.

Metsu also helped the Emirates navigate the first qualifying round for next year's World Cup before jumping ship to Qatar in September and being replaced by his assistant, Dominique Bathenay.

Underwhelming defence

Bathenay oversaw the UAE's defence of the Gulf Cup in Oman in January, which was underwhelming to say the least. An opening 3-1 win over Yemen was followed by a goalless draw against his mentor Metsu's Qatar, before a 3-0 defeat to the Saudis sent the Emirates packing.

And if proof were needed that professionalism is yet to seep fully into Emirati football, events in the build-up to that tournament should suffice, as a major dispute between the FA and the Professional League Association broke out over whether to cancel league games to give the national team more time to prepare.

Last-minute preparations for the tournament were also hampered as young striker Ahmed Khalil missed the tournament through injury and 2007 hero Matar was forced to return home on the eve of the championship following the death of his father. This left Mohammed Omar as the UAE's only recognised striker for the start of the competition; and although Matar returned, the Emirates' form did not.

After the tournament Bathenay lamented his lack of options up front, with Matar (Al Wahda) and Omar (Al Nasr) the only Emiratis who had regularly starts up front for their clubs.

"The foreign strikers certainly leave a positive impact on the field, but it would be good for the national team if the clubs distributed their foreigners in defence and midfield as well," said Bathenay. "The foreigners should not have a monopoly in attack as such a strategy prejudices against local talents, which in turns affects the national team in a negative way.

"The foreign strikers can miss a number of opportunities in front

Debut...UAE players confront referee Alexey Spirin during their World Cup game against West Germany in 1990

of goal but it is OK. If a local striker misses a chance or two, he is banished to the bench or the reserve team."

Brazilians such as Rafael Sobis and Fernando Baiano (both Al Jazira), Pinga (Al Wahda) and Anderson (Sharjah) are all high up the scoring charts, although by the midway point of the season only Baiano had scored more than Omar. Another South American to catch the eye has been the Chilean playmaker Jorge Valdivia (Al Ain). But although the country's population is around 4.6million and only about 20 per cent are Emirati, the football authorities – unlike those in Qatar and Bahrain – say they have no intention of allowing foreign-born players to represent their national side.

FIFA says the UAE has 82,776 players, although 75,000 of these are unregistered. Such numbers make it unlikely that the UAE could compete on an even footing with the likes of Japan, South Korea and Australia, or even neighbours Saudi Arabia and Iran, but there is hope for the future.

The Emirates will send teams to this year's Under-17 and Under-20 World Cups after an excellent 2008. The UAE claimed the Asian Under-19 Championship for the first time after winning all six of their games in Saudi Arabia, culminating in a 2-1 victory over Uzbekistan in the Final.

Khalil was the star, scoring twice in the Final and four times in total to finish as top scorer – a performance that saw him voted player of the tournament and subsequently win the Asian Young Footballer of the Year title for 2008.

Train with Chelsea

While the Al Ahli youngster got all the headlines, and the chance to train with Chelsea, the team as a whole proved their worth, beating South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Australia to become the first team from west Asia to win this tournament since 2000.

The group had been together for five years, so when Mahdi Ali replaced Tunisian Khaled Bin Yehya as coach just one week before the tournament the squad remained united and unruffled. The next step for this exciting young side is the Under-20 World Cup, in Egypt, in September.

The Australians were also one of the fall guys at the Asian Under-16 Championship as Abdulla Mohammad's injury-time goal gave the UAE a 3-2 win the quarter-finals in Uzbekistan. A semi-final defeat to eventual winners Iran failed to dampen spirits as reaching the final four ensured the Emirates' participation in the Under-17 World Cup, in Nigeria, in October.

Cup success...UAE skipper Hamdan Kamali receives the Asian Under-19 Championship trophy last year

Now 19, Khalil has since stepped up to the full international side and he scored in the UAE's 5-0 Asian Cup qualifying win in Malaysia in January. This was followed by a 1-0 home defeat to Uzbekistan, but with two of the three teams going through it would be a major upset if the Emirates did not reach the 2011 finals.

However, the UAE's chances of reaching their second World Cup finals, in 2010, have almost gone. Having been steered through to the group stage by Metsu, they have taken just one point from their first four games and – with trips to North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Iran to come – it would take a massive reversal of form for Bathenay's team to qualify.

While the progress of Khalil and Under-19 captain Hamdan Kamali makes the future look bright for football in the UAE, the bad news for Bathenay is that he may not be around long enough to take advantage of such emerging talent. Back in November the UAE FA admitted that they were in talks with former Milan and Italy coach Arrigo Sacchi and they appear keen to hire a foreign manager. ●

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

Al Ahli, Al Jazira, Al Shabab...a guide to the top-division teams

1 AL AHLI

Ended the first half of the season level on points with leaders Al Jazira. Formed in 1970, the Red Knights have won four titles, most recently in 2006, while they won the last of their seven President's Cups last season with a 2-0 victory over Dubai rivals Al Wasl. Young starlet Ahmed Khalil should get the chance to enhance his growing reputation in this year's Asian Champions League.

2 AL AIN

Two points off the top of the table at the halfway point and in both cup semi-finals, Ain manager Winifried Schafer can be pleased with his side's season so far. Formed in 1968, the country's most-popular club have won the league a record nine times. In 2003 they became the only Emirati team to win the Asian Champions League, and two years later they were runners-up. Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed, president of the UAE, is the club's honorary president, while Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed, the Crown prince of Abu Dhabi, is the president. Such connections have led to the club being affectionately referred to as "The Boss". Their distinctive purple kit was inspired by Belgian side Anderlecht.

3 AJMAN

The new boys have been a real surprise and occupied the fourth and final Asian Champions League spot after half of the current season. They were also a perfect example of parity, with 11 goals scored and just as many conceded in their 11 games. The Orange Brigade have won many admirers for their attractive style of play. The big question now is can they continue to outperform the well-resourced clubs from Dubai and Abu Dhabi?

4 DHAFRA

Formed in 2000, Dhafra finished one place above the drop zone last season, albeit with a nine-point cushion. The young club readily admit their only aim this season is survival – which helps to explain why they have drawn almost half of their games. Former Syria coach Mohammed Kiwd took charge on the eve of the season but resigned in December. He was replaced by Eid Baroud, the only Emirati managing in the top flight. Early signs are positive as he has taken the club to the semi-finals of the President's Cup.

5 AL JAZIRA

Sheikh Mansour Bin Zayed's team have never won the title, or indeed the President's Cup, but they led the table on goal difference at the halfway stage of this season, losing just one of their opening 11 games. Record signing Rafael Sobis has done well, but Brazilian compatriot Fernando Baiano was even more impressive, leading the League's scoring chart with 11 goals. They were runners-up last season and look a good bet to go one better this time under Brazilian coach Abel Braga, who led Internacional to victory in the Copa Libertadores and FIFA Club World Cup in 2006. They could also make an impact on this year's Asian Champions League. Former players include George Weah, Phillip Cocu and Bonaventure Kalou.

6 KHALEEJ

Promoted after winning the second division last year, but bottom of the table and three points from safety after 11 games this season, having won just two games. One of these was an impressive 5-2 win over Al Nasr, but highlights have been few and far between for the team from the scenic coastal town of Khor Fakkan. A 3-1 defeat to Dhafra in the quarter-finals of the President's Cup means they are now able to concentrate solely on survival.

7 AL NASR

The Blue Wave have won three league titles and three President's Cups, but success has dried up of late with no trophies in the last 20 years. Thee League's entertainers, they scored 20 goals and conceded 23 in their first 11 matches. The Dubai club were formed in 1945 and their Al Maktoum Stadium was officially opened in May 1978 with a game against then-European champions Liverpool, who won 5-0.

8 AL SHA'AB

Since being formed in 1974, The Commandos have been mostly in the shadow of neighbours Sharjah. They have just one President's Cup to their name, but surprised everyone by finishing runners-up in the League last season. This year, however, they are at the opposite end of the table and were in the drop zone with just two wins after the first 11 matches.

9 AL SHABAB

The Slashers celebrated their 50th anniversary by winning the League last year, but have made a woeful title defence and at the halfway point of the season found themselves just one place and three points above the relegation zone. Drawn in a group that includes big-spending Uzbekistan side Bunyodkor and the 2007 runners-up Sepahan from Iran, the Asian Champions League would appear to offer little respite for under-pressure coach Toninho Cerezo, who won 57 caps for Brazil.

10 SHARJAH

The White Bees have won five titles, including the inaugural championship in 1973-74, but their last league success came 13 years ago. Founded in 1966, they have won the President's Cup a record eight times. Sharjah beat Indian champions Dempo 3-0 in a one-legged play-off in February to seal a place in the Asian Champions League.

11 AL WAHDA

An unconvincing first half of the season was illuminated by victory over Abu Dhabi rivals Al Jazira on penalties to reach the President's Cup semi-finals. Josef Hickersberger, who coached Austria at Euro 2008, took charge in December and Wahda are in the last four of both domestic cup competitions. However, the form that took them to the 2007 Asian Champions League semi-finals is a distant memory.

12 AL WASL

The Cheetahs have sped through coaches this season, with Jaroslav Horak from the Czech Republic being the third to select the team...so far. The Dubai side, who were founded in 1974, have won seven national titles – only Al Ain have more – but since a league-and-cup double in 2007 they have lost their way.

The movers and shakers in UAE FOOTBALL

ISMAIL MATAR
The UAE's best player ended a 10-game international drought by scoring twice in the 5-0 win over Malaysia in January. The 25-year-old striker, who plays for Al Wahda, was runner-up in the Asian Footballer of the Year award, scored five goals in as many games as the UAE won the 2007 Gulf Cup and was voted the best player at the 2003 Under-20 World Cup.

ROMY GAI
The League's chief executive spent 14 years as an administrator with Juventus before leaving the Italian club in 2006. Gai took up his current role last June and has extensive experience of dealing with UEFA and the now-defunct G14 group.

DR SULAIMAN AL FAHIM
The CEO of Hydra Properties helped negotiate Sheikh Mansour's takeover of Manchester City and is currently advising Falcon Equity – a Swiss-based private-equity partnership – about possible takeovers of European clubs, including Chelsea. Al Fahim also helped set up a training academy for Emirati youngsters in partnership with Internazionale, and hosts the UAE version of TV show *The Apprentice*, which is called *Hydra Executives*.

RAFAEL SOBIS

Al Jazira paid Real Betis a national record £12million for the Brazil international last September. The Spanish side received a similar offer from English Premier League side Newcastle for the striker last July, but he chose to move to Abu Dhabi after helping his country win bronze at the Beijing Olympics.

KHALDOON AL MUBARAK
Being chairman of Manchester City is just one of Al Mubarak's jobs. Among other things he is also chairman of Abu Dhabi Motorsport Management, who are organising the inaugural Abu Dhabi Grand Prix which takes place in November, and chairman of the Executive Affairs Authority of the Government of Abu Dhabi, helping to oversee healthcare and education in the capital.

SHEIKH MANSOUR BIN ZAYED
The owner of Manchester City and Abu Dhabi side Al Jazira has shown ambition with both of his clubs. City's bid for Milan's Kaka in January made the headlines, but Jazira's signing of Sobis in September was a historic deal in UAE football history.

DOMINIQUE BATHENAY
The Frenchman took over as coach of the national team in September last year after the man he was previously assistant to, compatriot Bruno Metsu, left to take charge of Qatar. However, his reign so far has seen just two wins – against Yemen and Malaysia – in 10 games.

AHMED KHALIL
The Al Ahli striker's goals, including two in the 2008 Final against Uzbekistan, gave the UAE a first-ever victory in the Asian Under-19 Championship in Saudi Arabia. Subsequently voted Asian Young Football of the Year, he scored for the national side against Malaysia in January. Much is expected of him and his team-mates at the Under-20 World Cup in Egypt.

BACKGROUND BRIEFING

● The UAE's new professional league runs from September through to May, with the 12 teams playing each other twice, on a home-and-away basis. The top three clubs automatically qualify for the group stage of the Asian Champions League, with the side finishing fourth going into a play-off game to join them. The two teams finishing bottom are relegated.

● There are two domestic cup competitions. The President's Cup is open to all the teams in the top two divisions, while the Etisalat Cup is a new competition this season for the 12 professional clubs in the top division.

● Each club are allowed to have three foreigners in their first-team squads, with three more permitted in the reserves. Players from Brazil are particularly popular this season.

Success...Al Ahli won last year's President's Cup

TALENT SCOUT

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

BRAZIL

WALTER

Internacional, 22.07.89

Centre-forward who arrived a virtual unknown and left a star. Possesses the speed and strength to transform hopeful punts upfield into goalscoring opportunities. A fearsome striker of the ball who can also be subtle, slipping through or laying off passes for his team-mates and dropping deep to link the play. A real find.

PARAGUAY

Ronald HUTH

Liverpool (Eng), 30.08.89

A strong candidate for centre-back of the tournament. Not the quickest player ever, but a commanding figure with a natural air of authority who dominates the space in front of him. His left-footed passing out of defence was also the launching pad for many of his team's attacks.

BRAZIL

DOUGLAS COSTA

Gremio, 14.09.90

Had an uneven tournament, initially losing his place in the side and inconsistent even after winning it back. At present he is a player for moments rather than matches – but the moments are of remarkable talent. Wiry, wriggly attacking midfielder with a terrific burst of pace. His slight frame generates astonishing power in his left-footed shots.

PARAGUAY

Hernan PEREZ

Libertad, 25.02.89

Joint-top marksman and the only player to score four goals in the decisive second phase. This right-sided midfielder is a strong, slippery runner with the ball who is full of sudden stops and changes of direction. Weighed in with a variety of superb goals, from a first-time finish after latching on to a through ball to rounding off a mazy dribble with a shot from range.

BRAZIL

SANDRO

Internacional, 15.03.89

A tall, powerful central midfielder who captained his country. Fierce in the tackle, with good defensive anticipation, he can also distribute with either foot and then rumble forward to link up with the attack. His range of passing needs improving, but in a problem area for Brazil it will be interesting to see if he is fast-tracked into the senior squad.

URUGUAY

Nicholas LODEIRO

Nacional, 21.03.89

Stocky, attacking midfielder, left footed but with a very useful right, he was the brains of the team. Made the game flow by choosing his options calmly, opening up the defence by switching the play and working little push-and-goes through the middle.

Tim Vickery picks his top 12 players from the South American Under-20 Championship

URUGUAY

Jonathan URRETAVISCAYA

Benfica (Por), 19.03.90

A Cristiano Ronaldo-type figure. Of similar build but with a few less step-overs, he is also outstanding in one-against-one situations and his burst of pace from a standing start is devastating. Attacked from both flanks, scored goals and set them up too with well-flighted crosses and crisply struck passes that pierced the defensive line.

ARGENTINA

Eduardo SALVIO

Lanus, 13.05.90

Along with silky left-footed midfielder Leandro Velazquez, the only Argentinian to emerge with his reputation intact. Stocky figure who featured either wide right or attacking through the middle, turning and committing defenders, playing little one-twos and shooting well. After a bright start, though, he faded badly.

VENEZUELA

Rafael ROMO

Llaneros, 25.02.90

Goalkeeper who deserves much of the credit for Venezuela's first qualification for the World Youth Cup. The hosts would have been out at the group stage without his injury-time penalty save against Colombia. Giant figure who in almost every game had to make a series of saves to keep his team in contention. However, he can be untidy and clumsy looking, and holds very little. Could be a busy man in Egypt.

ECUADOR

Deison MENDEZ

LDU, 27.10.90

Along with attacking midfielder Jefferson Montero (who was featured last year in these pages), another who promises to be of long-term importance at senior level. Spindly centre-back who is calm and classy, with good timing in the tackle. A possible future replacement for Ivan Hurtado.

COLOMBIA

Javier REINA

Vitoria (Bra), on loan from Cruzeiro (Bra), 04.01.89

Little left-footed playmaker who provided the few rays of inspiration in a bulked-up and ordinary side. Elusive runner with the ball, full of probing passes and constantly willing to accept responsibility for generating attacking ideas. One defect: often came close, but failed to score.

BOLIVIA

Alex ARANCIBIA

Oriente Petrolero, 28.01.90

It might be relatively easy for the goalkeeper in the weakest side to be the hero – there is plenty to do and little pressure to make decisive saves – but he demonstrated athleticism, flexibility and assurance that brought back memories of former USSR keeper Rinat Dasayev.

TACTICS The guide to who plays how

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

4-4-2 FORMATION OF CHOICE

MANCHESTER UNITED

The Premiership may claim to be the world's most exciting league but it still lacks something in tactical sophistication. United's strength-in-depth gives manager Alex Ferguson options, but he tends to go with the same formula: Dimitar Berbatov and Wayne Rooney (Carlos Tevez is another option on the bench) drop deep, width comes from Cristiano Ronaldo and Ryan Giggs, and Michael Carrick is the supplier.

Also used by: Arsenal, Blackburn, Fulham, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, Stoke, Sunderland, Tottenham, West Brom, West Ham and Wigan.

Deep...Rooney and Berbatov

4-2-3-1 ALL EYES ON TORRES

LIVERPOOL

Manager Rafa Benitez's cautious approach, with two defensive midfielders in Javier Mascherano and Xabi Alonso, gives Steven Gerrard the freedom to roam behind the main striker, Fernando Torres, without any of the defensive responsibility that Benitez believes inhibits the inspirational Gerrard's game. There was no room for Robbie Keane – a classic second striker – in this formation, but with Keane now back at Spurs, Liverpool have very few options if Torres is injured. Another weakness of the formation is that there is little attacking width in the final third unless the full-backs get forward.

Inspiration...Gerrard

A TACTICAL HISTORY OF... Frank Rijkaard

Dutch master...Rijkaard had a plan to stop Brazil's Roberto Carlos

1999 HOLLAND 4-3-3

A friendly with Brazil in Amsterdam in October 1999 was one of the rare occasions when Rijkaard opted for an attacking trident. But he did not adopt this tactic as a positive move. In playing Dennis Bergkamp on the right-wing – a position the latter hated – Rijkaard hoped to negate the attacking forays of Brazil's left-back Roberto Carlos.

2000 HOLLAND 4-4-2

Throughout Euro 2000, where his side were knocked out in the semi-finals by Italy on penalties, Rijkaard stuck religiously to a 4-4-2 featuring deep-lying wingers, the brawn and dynamism in central midfield of Edgar Davids, and the exceptional front line of Bergkamp and Patrick Kluivert. Three maxims: play with width, dictate the tempo and seek numerical superiority in midfield.

2001-02 SPARTA ROTTERDAM 4-4-1-1

Denied the talent he'd had with Holland, Rijkaard played it relatively safe and packed his midfield with players whose main brief was to screen the back four. However, too many individual mistakes made for a porous rearguard – one which made relegation to the second division inevitable. The one ray of light was Moroccan Nourdin Boukhari, who was essentially a left winger that could also cut inside effectively.

Sample formations from England's top flight

ON THE BREAK

Since the signing of Emile Heskey from Wigan, Villa are possibly no longer the best example of this formation because the arrival of the big England centre-forward has given manager Martin O'Neill the option of playing 4-4-2. However, he still has the alternative of using this tried-and-trusted 4-5-1 formation to exploit the blistering pace of wide man Ashley Young and striker Gabriel Agbonlahor. It also allows midfielders Steve Sidwell, Stiliyan Petrov and Gareth Barry to play a counter-attacking game.

Also used by: Bolton, Chelsea (under Luiz Felipe Scolari) and Hull.

Pace...Ashley Young

4-4-1-1 MAKING ENDS MEET

This formation has been forced upon manager David Moyes due to a lack of attacking options. Midfielder Tim Cahill normally plays as the second striker behind a front runner, but he has also filled in as the centre-forward on occasions (with Marouane Fellaini in the second-striker role). That option is less likely to be forced upon Moyes now Jo has arrived on loan from Manchester City for the remainder of the season.

Also used by: Man City.

Adaptable...Cahill

How the Dutchman's teams have change down the years

2004-2006 BARCELONA 4-1-2-2-1

The system Rijkaard used to steer Barca to two Liga triumphs (2005 and 2006) and the Champions League (2006) was based on an intelligent, short-passing game, with virtuosity and maximum interplay between the midfield and forward line. Ronaldinho nominally lined up on the left but rarely stayed on the flank long enough to have touchline chalk on his boots. Midfield strategists Xavi and Deco played vital roles.

2007 BARCELONA 3-1-3-3

Rijkaard experimented with this formation in the latter part of the 2006-07 season. It was essentially a ploy to fit cultured midfielders Xavi, Deco and Iniesta into the same line-up. Attacking purpose and excitement were guaranteed but it was far too reckless in the sense that the engine room was imbalanced towards the creative. With Barca very narrow in midfield, the opposition had a field day exposing their flanks.

Style...Rijkaard's Barca won the 2006 Champions League

SOCCER CITIES

RIO DE JANEIRO The clubs, the history, what to see, how to get there

Home of the

Local pride...Botafogo won last season's Rio state title

Fireworks...Flu fans get in the mood before a Copa Libertadores game at the Maracana last year

Iconic...Rio's Christ the Redeemer statue on top of the Corcovado mountain

beautiful game

Peterjon Cresswell flies down to Rio and takes a tour of Brazil's second-largest city

Big shot...Vasco's Romario claimed to have matched Pele's 1,000 goals in 2007

RIO. IF THREE LETTERS could sum up the magic of the global game it is those that spell out Brazil's beachside metropolis of football, carnival and samba. However, the everyday reality is, of course, somewhat different.

Despite undergoing serious renovation in 1992 after a stand crumbled, the city's legendary Maracana Stadium is the centrepiece of Brazil's hosting of the World Cup in 2014 – but, tellingly, it is the only venue in the city to have been put forward.

The grounds of Flamengo and Fluminense each hold a mere 8,000 and both play their home matches at the Maracana – as do Vasco da Gama, whose 36,000-capacity Sao Januario is open on one side and has had a chapel standing in the gap since 1955. Botafogo, meanwhile, play at the new Joao Havelange Olympic Stadium, but that too has had problems, with a wall collapsing just six weeks after its inauguration in 2007.

After more than a century of city-wide competition, Rio's big four have won all but 11 of the Rio state championship titles (the Campeonato Carioca). And of these 111 trophies, Flamengo and Fluminense have 60 each, making Fla-Flu one of the game's great derbies and as lively as any you could name.

The people's club

Flamengo, the Rubros-Negros (the red-blacks), were originally formed – as were many clubs in Brazil – as a rowing club, in 1895. Called "the people's club", the most popular team in Brazil are known for their mascot urubu (a vulture) and were originally based on the south-west shore of Rodrigo De Freitas lagoon, fringed by Ipanema and Copacabana.

Fluminense – who are known as Nense, or Tricolores because of their maroon, green and white kit – were founded in 1902 by Oscar Cox, a diplomat's son who brought football to Rio after his contemporary Charles William Miller had introduced it to Sao Paulo. Oscar's younger brother, Edwin, became a legendary Nense goalscorer who won three successive state championships.

Based in residential Laranjeiras, Fluminense traditionally have an upper-class following and are also referred to as Po-de-arroz, which relates to the rice powder used to whiten the face of mulatto wplayer Carlos

THE STADIUMS

JOAO HAVELANGE OLYMPIC STADIUM

Also known as Engenhao, the new home of Botafogo is named after the long-term FIFA president and has a capacity of 45,000. It is set in the northern district of Engenho de Dentro.

SAO JANUARIO

Vasco da Gama's quaint but little-used ground is near the National Observatory in Sao Cristovao.

LARANJEIRAS

Built in 1905, Fluminense's nominal home stadium is one of the oldest in Brazil.

RUA ARQUIAS CORDEIRO

RUA GENERAL ALMERIO DE MOURA

RUA PROFESSOR EURICO RABELO

RIO DE JANEIRO

RUA ALVARO CHAVES

AVENIDA BORGES DE MEDEIROS

GAVEA

Also known as Jose Bastos Padilha Stadium and originally opened in September 1938, Flamengo now use it as a training ground.

MARACANA

Set to become only the second stadium to stage two World Cup Finals, the Maracana is a football icon. Built for the 1950 World Cup, it was still unfinished when a world record 200,000 piled into it for the game between Brazil and Uruguay. Since then, it has become the de facto home ground for the big four Rio clubs and Pele scored his 1,000th goal here, for Santos against Vasco da Gama in 1969. By the 1980s it was crumbling, and in 1992 three people died and 50 were injured when a stand collapsed. Its capacity was reduced with the conversion to all-seating, with the current limit being 95,000. The Maracana has its own stop on metro line 2, which is two stops from central Estacio. All clubs except Vasco sell each other's tickets. Major hotels and Ticketmaster (www.ticketmaster.com.br) are other sources. Expect to pay R$30 for seats in the neutral white zone, R$25 in the livelier green section and R$20 in the rowdy blue one. If you're splashing out, R$100 gets you an especial for a once-in-a-lifetime view. Tours (9am-5pm, 8am-11am on match days) cost R$20.

Alberto in 1916 (Flu being late in accepting black players into the fold).

It was the departure of disgruntled Fluminense players from the club that led to the formation of a football section at Flamengo on Christmas Eve, 1911, and the following year saw the first Fla-Flu derby.

Among the many hundreds of legends surrounding this game is one concerning the Rodrigo De Freitas lagoon itself. With the 1941 Carioca decider going down to the last minutes of the final game, the score stood at 2-2. With Flu only needing a draw to clinch victory in those pre-Maracana days, the *Tricolores* players took advantage of Fla's Gavea ground by hoofing the ball into the lake to run the clock down and take the championship.

During another 2-2 thriller, in 1995, ex-Fla striker Renato Gaucho denied

> **"Fla-Flu is one of the great derbies and as lively as any you could name"**

his former club a centenary Carioca title by deflecting in a late winner for *Nense* with his stomach. The so-called "Belly Goal" was to become the most famous goal of the international's 16-year career.

The winners of five national championships, Flamengo are forever linked to the side of Zico and Junior who won what is now called the Club World Cup in 1981. Of more recent legend is the *Rubros-Negros* side that rose from the relegation zone to third place and qualified for the 2008 Libertadores Cup, only to lose 3-0 at the Maracana to America of Mexico in the last 16 after winning the away leg 4-2.

Fluminense – who will always be associated with long-term player Tele Santana, who coached Brazil at the 1982 and 1986 World Cups – won their solitary national title in 1984.

Despite last year's first-ever relegation from the national league, Vasco da Gama have been Rio's most successful side of the last decade and were the last team from the city to win the national championship (the last of their four titles coming in 2000). Named after the Portuguese explorer, Vasco are based in the northern district of Sao Cristovao and enjoy a popular following among the city's Portuguese community.

Botafogo played the first Rio derby (with Fluminense) in 1905. Originally a rowing club like Flamengo, they were named after Rio's beachside district but based across the water in Niteroi, home of their former ground, the Caio Martins, before they moved to the modern Joao Havelange Olympic Stadium. ●

Grudge game...Flamengo (left) versus Fluminense is one of the world's great derby matches

SURVIVAL GUIDE

Carnival city

● ARRIVAL & TRANSPORT

Antonio Carlos Jobim Airport (+55 21 3398 4526, www.infraero.gov.br), also known as Galeao, is 13 miles north of the city. Buses run to the major hotels. A taxi to the centre is about R$60. For city buses, keep R$2-3 handy to pay as you board. The two-line metro crosses at Estacio and a single ticket costs R$2.30.

● HOTELS & INFORMATION

Tourist information desks can be found at airport terminals, the Novo Rio bus station and RioTur (avenida Princesa Isabel 183, Copacabana, +55 21 2541 7522, open Mon-Fri only). Hotels tend to be booked out for New Year and the carnival in early February, but for the rest of the year there are lots to choose from. The most famous is the Copacabana Palace (avenida Atlantica 1702, +55 21 2548 7070, www.copacabanapalace.com.br, R$1,000) of movie-star legend. For mid-price range, try the Ipanema Beach House (rua Barao da Torre 485, +55 21 3202 2693, www.ipanemahouse.com, R$140). In the centre, the Guanabara Palace (avenida Presidente Vargas 392, +55 21 2195 6000, www.windsorhoteis.com.br, R$400) has a view of Corcovado from its upper floors. Near Botafogo metro is the El Misti (praia de Botafogo 462, Casa 9, +55 21 2226 0991, www.elmistihostel.com, R$100), which is run by Argentines.

● EATING & DRINKING

The Zona Sul has many traditional eateries, such as Brasileirinho (rua Jangadeiros 10A, Ipanema, +55 21 2513 5184). For seafood, Siri Mole e Cia (rua Francisco Otaviano 50, Copacabana, +55 21 2267 0894) is a local favourite. Bars are popular meeting places and include Cobal de Humaita (rua Voluntarios da Patria 446) below the Christ statue. O Plebeu (rua Capitao Salomao 50, +55 21 2286 0699) is popular with Botafogo fans, the Casa Rosa (rua Alice 550, +55 21 2557 2562) is in *Nense* territory and Cobal do Leblon (rua Gilberto Cardoso) packs with Flamengo followers. Foreigners flock to Lord Jim (rua Paul Redfern 63, +55 21 2259 3047) in Ipanema. Clubbing can be enjoyed at central Club Six (rua das Marrecas 38, www.clubsix.com.br).

● DAYTIME ENTERTAINMENT

Take a cable car up Sugar Loaf Mountain (avenida Pasteur 520, www.bondinho.com.br, R$35) and the cog-wheel railway (rua Cosme Velho 513, www.corcovado.com.br, R$33) up Corcovado. The best beaches are Ipanema and Copacabana. Visit the Museu Historico Nacional (praca Marechal Ancora, +55 21 2550 9224, www.museuhistoriconacional.com.br) for local history. For shops, go to Shopping Leblon (avenida Afranio de Melo Franco 290) or the vast Saara market, near Uruguiana metro.

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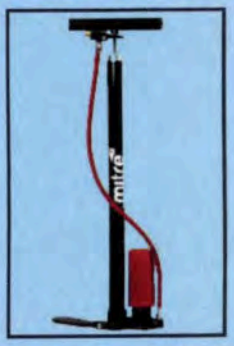

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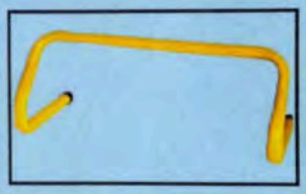

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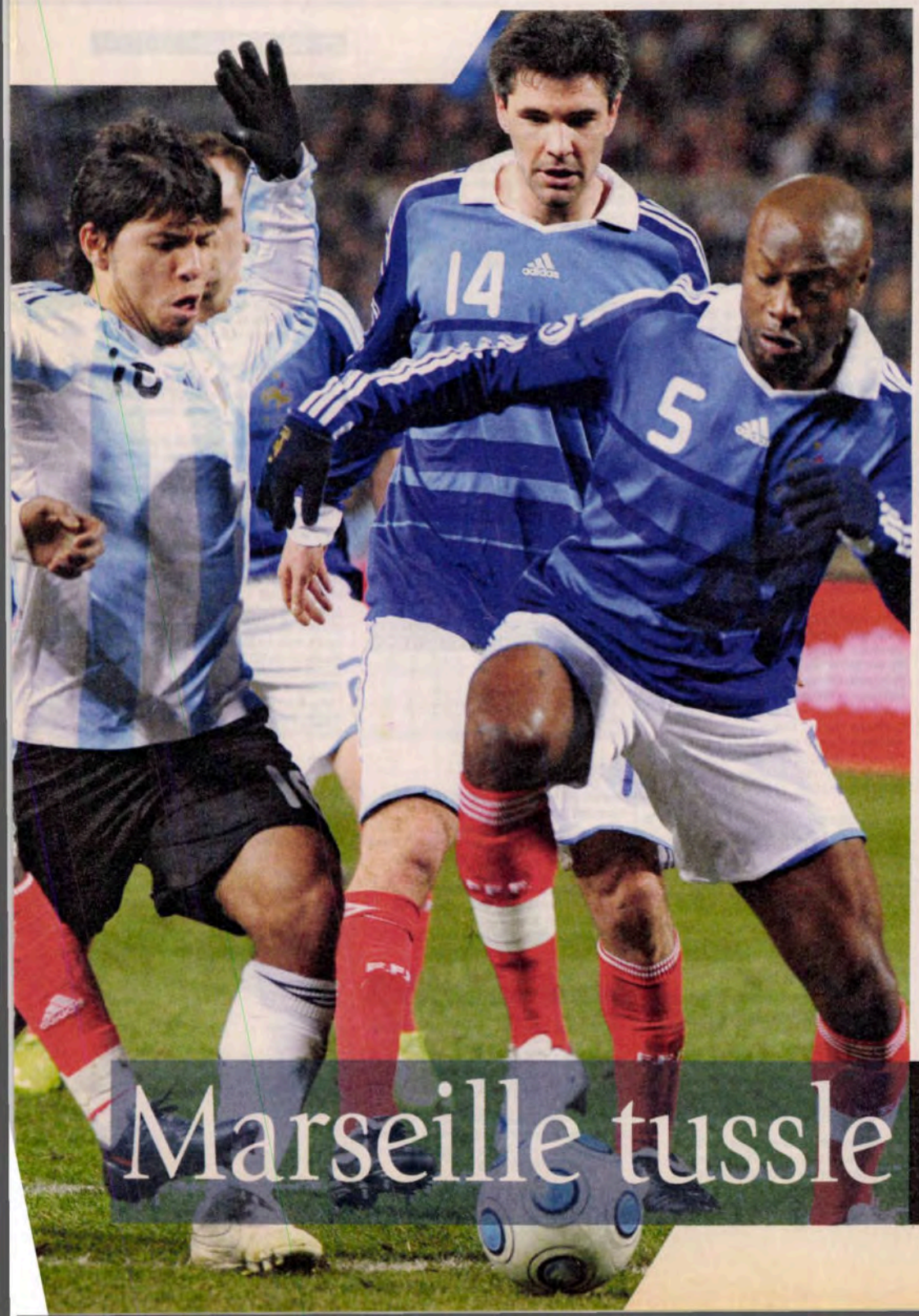

Marseille tussle

William Gallas (right) beats Sergio Aguero (left) to the ball as Jeremy Toulalan looks on during the recent France-Argentina friendly in Marseille. Argentina won 2-0 with goals from Jonas Gutierrez and Lionel Messi. More information and line-ups, page 85

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Loss...Hashemian

IRAN

In honour of his mum

Vahid Hashemian of Bochum in Germany played in Iran's 1-1 draw with South Korea despite the death of his mother just a week before.

The shared points mean the Koreans are still looking for their first-ever win in Iran.

ALBANIA

Missed opportunity

Albania, who have never reached a World Cup finals, missed the chance to go top of their qualifying group when they were held 0-0 in Malta.

1997 last time Mexico won a match in the US

NORTHERN IRELAND

Great on the road

The 3-0 victory away to San Marino was Northern Ireland's biggest overseas win for 41 years.

CYPRUS

Orient international

Jason Demetriou, who plays his football in the third tier of English football with Leyton Orient, made his debut for Cyprus against Serbia.

Held...Albania in Malta

RESULTS

WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

ASIA
4th stage

Group 1

Feb 11 - Yokohama
Japan 0
Australia 0
Att: 65,571. **Ref:** Basma (Syr)
Japan: Tsuzuki - Nagamoto, Tulio Tanaka, Nakazawa, Uchida, Endo, Hasebe, Matsui (Okubo 57), S Nakamura, Tamada, Tatsuya Tanaka (Okazaki 83).
Australia: Schwarzer - Neill, Moore, Cahill (Kennedy 85), Culina, Wilkshire, Chipperfield, Grella, Valeri, Bresciano (Carney 90), Holman (Garcia 64).

Feb 11 - Tashkent
Uzbekistan 0
Bahrain 1 (Abdulrahman 90)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Mohd Salleh (Mly)
Uzbekistan: Nesterov - Gafurov, Ismailov, Tuhtahujaev, Hasanov (Denisov 59), Djeparov, Ahmedov, Tadjiyev (Soliev 69), Magdeev, Jurayev, Kapadze (Shatskikh 55).
Bahrain: Jaffer - Fatadi (Omar 70), Hubail, Okwunwanne (Saad 89), Salmeen, Latif (Al-Dakheel 77), Abdulrahman, Isa, Omar, Adnan, Baba.

WC QUALS: ASIA – 4TH STAGE – GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Australia	4	3	1	0	6	0	10
Japan	4	2	2	0	7	3	8
Bahrain	4	1	1	2	4	5	4
Qatar	4	1	1	2	4	8	4
Uzbekistan	4	0	1	3	1	6	1

Group 2

Feb 11 - Tehran
Iran 1 (Nekounam 57)
South Korea 1 (Park Ji-sung 81)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 75,000. **Ref:** Williams (Aus)
Iran: Rahmati - Ashjari, Hosseini, Aghily, Bagheri, Hashemian (Akbarpour 82), Khalatbari (Borhani 84), Kaebi, Nekounam, Shojaei (Gholamnejad 73).
South Korea: Lee Woon-jae - Oh Beom-seok, Cho Yong-hyung, Kang Min-soo, Lee Young-pyo (Kim Dong-jin 69), Lee Chung-yong, Kim Jung-woo, Ki Sung-yueng, Park Ji-sung (Park Chu-young 83), Jeong Sung-hoon (Yeom Ki-hoon 42), Lee Keun-ho.

Feb 11 - Pyongyang
North Korea 1 (Mun In-guk 29)
Saudi Arabia 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 48,000. **Ref:** Irmatov (Uzb)
North Korea: Ri Myong-guk - Cha Jong-hyok, Ri Jun-il, Pak Nam-chol, Ri Kwang-chon, Ji Yun-nam, An Yong-hak (An Chol-hyok 67; Kim Myong-won 85), Hong Yong-jo, Mun In-guk, Jong Tae-se, Pak Chol-jin.
Saudi Arabia: Ali - Hawsawi, Al-Marshadi, Ateef, Shuhail, Noor, Al-Fraidi (Al-Mousa 77), Al-Numari (Al-Rahed 38), Al-Dossary, Al-Jassam (Autef 82), Y Al-Qahtani.

WC QUALS: ASIA – 4TH STAGE – GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Korea	4	2	2	0	8	3	8
North Korea	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
Iran	4	1	3	0	5	4	6
Saudi Arabia	4	1	1	2	3	5	4
UAE	4	0	1	3	4	9	1

Top two in each group qualify for the finals. The third-placed countries will meet in a play-off, the winners of which will meet the Oceania section winners (New Zealand) for a place in the finals

CONCACAF
4th stage

Feb 11 - San Jose
Costa Rica 2 (Furtado 49, 59)
Honduras 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 18,000. **Ref:** Aguilar (ElS)
Costa Rica: R Gonzalez - Fernandez, Umana, Borges, Myrie, Saborio (Hernandez 53), Centeno, Furtado, Alonso (Oviedo 72), Diaz, Sunsing (Herrera 75).
Honduras: N Valladares - Figueroa, Thomas, Bernardez, Rodriguez (R Nunez 50), Guevara, D Suazo, Guerrero, Garcia, W Martinez (M Chavez 40), E Martinez.

Feb 11 - San Salvador
El Salvador 2 (Romero 79, 90)
Trinidad & Tobago 2 (C Edwards 7, Yorke pen 27)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 25,000. **Ref:** Rodriguez (Mex)
El Salvador: Gomez - Escobar, Gonzalez, L Hernandez (W Torres 33), Martin (Coreas 60), Sanchez, Romero, Rudis Corrales (Zelaya 46), Quintanilla, Pacheco, Castillo.
Trinidad & Tobago: Ince - A Edwards, K Thomas (Hislop 12), Lawrence, Birchall (Leon 59), Daniel, C Edwards, S John (Glen 76), Jones, Spann, Yorke. *Sent off: Yorke 90min.*

Feb 11 - Columbus
United States 2 (Bradley 43, 90)
Mexico 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 23,776. **Ref:** Batres (Gtm)
United States: Howard - Hejduk, Bocanegra, Onyewu, Pearce, Dempsey, Bradley, Kljestan (Clark 86), Beasley, Donovan, Ching (Altidore 83).
Mexico: O Sanchez - A Galindo, Salcido, Marquez, Osorio, Leandro Augusto, A Medina (Naelson 60), Pardo, C Ochoa, N Castillo (I Martinez 34), Giovani (Bravo 72). *Sent off: Marquez 65min.*

WC QUALS: CONCACAF – 4TH STAGE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Costa Rica	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
United States	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Trinidad & Tob	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
El Salvador	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Honduras	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Mexico	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

The top three qualify for the finals; the fourth-placed country will meet the fifth-placed South American country for a place in the finals

EUROPE

Group 1

Feb 11 - Valletta
Malta 0
Albania 0
Att: 2,041. **Ref:** Deaconu (Rom)
Malta: Haber - A Muscat (Failla 82), A Agius, Dimech, G Agius (Fenech 87), M Mifsud, Sammut, Cohen, Schembri, S Bajada, Scerri (Briffa 70).
Albania: Hidi - Agolli (Vangjeli 46; Lila 81), Beqiri, Curri, Dallku, Vrapi, Bulku, Lika, Duro, Skela, Bogdani (Berisha 76).

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Denmark	3	2	1	0	6	2	7
Hungary	4	2	1	1	4	2	7
Albania	5	1	3	1	3	2	6
Portugal	4	1	2	1	6	3	5
Sweden	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
Malta	5	0	1	4	0	11	1

Group 3

Feb 11 - Serravalle
San Marino 0
Northern Ireland 3 (McAuley 6, McCann 32, Brunt 63)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 1,942. **Ref:** Stankovic (Ser)
San Marino: F Valentini - C Valentini, Della Valle, D Simoncini, Vannucci, Bacciocchi (F Vitaioli 79), Berretti, Muccioli, Michele Marani, M Vitaioli (Casadei 86), Manuel Marani. *Sent off: Manuel Marani 69min.*
Northern Ireland: Taylor - McAuley, Craigan, Hughes (McCourt 81), McCartney, Johnson, McCann, Davis, Healy, Paterson (Feeney 76), Lafferty (Brunt 55).

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slovakia	4	3	0	1	8	5	9
N Ireland	5	2	1	2	8	4	7
Czech Rep	4	2	1	1	5	2	7
Poland	4	2	1	1	6	4	7
Slovenia	4	2	1	1	5	3	7
San Marino	5	0	0	5	1	15	0

Group 8

Feb 11 - Dublin
Republic of Ireland 2 (Keane pen 72, 78)
Georgia 1 (A Iashvili 1)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 45,000. **Ref:** Hyytia (Fin)
Rep Ireland: Given - Kelly, Dunne, O'Shea, Kilbane, McGeady, Whelan, Andrews, Duff (S Hunt 80), Doyle, Keane.
Georgia: Lomaia - Lobjanidze, Khizanishvili, Kaladze, Kvirkvelia, Razmadze, Menteshashvili (Khmaladze 70), Kobiashvili, Gotsiridze (Merebashvili 68), Siradze (Aleksidze 77), A Iashvili.

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Italy	4	3	1	0	6	2	10
Rep Ireland	4	3	1	0	5	2	10
Bulgaria	3	0	3	0	2	2	3
Montenegro	3	0	2	1	3	4	2
Georgia	5	0	2	3	3	7	2
Cyprus	3	0	1	2	2	4	1

The group winners qualify for the finals. The best eight runners-up (from the nine groups) will play-off in four head-to-head ties, the winners of which will also qualify for the finals

See also World Cup Guide, starting page 87

CYPRUS TOURNAMENT

Semi-finals

Feb 10 - Nicosia
Cyprus 0
Serbia 2 (Jovanovic 25, Lazovic 42)
HT: 0-2
Cyprus: Giorgallides - Christofi (Demetriou 63), Satsias, Charalambous (Okkarides 70), Christou, Michael (Panagi 73), Elia (Nicolaou 46), Garpozis (Avraam 46), Makrides, Okkas (Yiasoumi 76), Constantinou.
Serbia: Stojkovic - Ivanovic, Vidic, Dragutinovic (Kolarov 68), Obradovic, Jankovic, Milijas (Matic 63), Stankovic (Kuzmanovic 46), Sulejmani (Krasic 46), Lazovic (Duric 82), Jovanovic (Tosic 46).

Feb 10 - Limassol
Slovakia 2 (Vittek 42, Hamsik 69)
Ukraine 3 (Valiaiev 10, Selezniov 47, Milevskyi pen 83)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Kailis (Cyp)
Slovakia: Senecky - Pekarik (Styvar 84), Skrtel, J Durica, Cech, Pecalka (Kucka 58), Strba (Hamsik 58), Obzera (Stoch 69), Kozak (M Petras 80), Sestak, Vittek.
Ukraine: Shovkovskyi - Mandziuk (Pashaiev 46), Chygrynskyi, Mychalyk, Nesmachnyi, Kravchenko (Kalinichenko 79), Valiaiev (Tymoshchuk 79), Rotan, Aliev, Milevskyi, Selezniov (Homeniuk 67).

Third-place play-off

Feb 11 - Nicosia
Cyprus 3 (Maragkos pen 32, Nicolaou 74, Okkas 82)
Slovakia 2 (Jez 88, Jendrisek 90)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 300
Cyprus: Avgousti (Giorgallides 90) - Okkarides (Christou 86), Constantinou (Charalambous 46), Panagi, Yiasoumi (Okkas 76), Nicolaou, Demetriou, Maragkos (Elia 53), Pavlou (Chrysostomos 69), Avraam, Christofi (Stylianou 79).
Slovakia: Mucha - Krajcik, Dobrotka (Skrtel 60), M Petras, P Petras (Cech 46), Jez, Kucka (Stoch 60), Hamsik, Svento (Vittek 46), Jendrisek, Styvar (Pekarik 68). *Sent off: Vittek 64min.*

Final

Feb 11 - Nicosia
Serbia 0
Ukraine 1 (Nazarenko 16)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Trattou (Cyp)
Serbia: Disljenkovic - Rukavina, Dragutinovic, Koiarov (Duric 75), Ivanovic, Lazovic (Sulejmani 46), Stankovic, Milijas (Kuzmanovic 46), Jovanovic, Krasic (Jankovic 71), Mutavdzic (Tosic 58).
Ukraine: Khudzhamov - Pashaiev (Chygrynskyi 46), Mandziuk, Rusol, Shevchuk, Tymoshchuk, Levchenko, Nazarenko, Kalinichenko (Rotan 90), Devic (Selezniov 89), Voronin (Homeniuk 46).

BELGIUM

Out of tune

Brazilian-born striker Igor De Camargo of Standard Liege started his first game for Belgium in their 2-0 win at home to Slovenia.

However, there were some puzzled looks from the visitors before the match started when the organisers played the Slovakian national anthem instead of the Slovenian one. Eventually the correct national song was found and it was broadcast at half-time.

LATVIA

Historic first

Latvia and Armenia met in a full international fixture for the first time, following the break up of the old Soviet Union, and played out a 0-0 draw in Limassol, Cyprus.

MOROCCO

Back in action

Veteran defender Talal El Karkouri came out of retirement to play for Roger Lemerre's side in the game against Czech Republic.

The former Charlton Athletic player quit international football last year after the Atlas Lions failed to reach the latter stages of the African Nations Cup.

NORWAY

Olsen's dream start

Having failed to win a single game during the whole of 2008, new temporary coach Egil Olsen got Norway off to a flying start with their first win against Germany in 73 years.

Their last and only previous victory against the Germans was a 2-0 triumph at the 1936 Olympics Games in Berlin.

Long wait...Norway

FRIENDLIES

Friday, February 6

Feb 6 - Los Angeles, USA
El Salvador 1 (Romero 23)
Peru 0
HT: 1-0
El Salvador: Montes - M Gonzalez, Hernandez, Sanchez, Pacheco, Romero, Castillo, Boicobar, Torres, Mayo, Quintanilla.
Peru: Butron (R Fernandez 45) - Contreras, Revoredo (Corzo 46), Villamarin, Galliquio, De la Haza, Marino (Quinteros 64), R Torres, M Torres (Trujillo 78), Alva (Barros 46), A Sanchez.

Saturday, February 7

Feb 7 - Faro, Portugal
Lithuania 1 (Klimavicius 26)
Poland 1 (Pawel Brozek 11)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 150. **Ref:** Duarte Gomes (Por)
Lithuania: Karcemarskas - Klimavicius, Alunderis, Zelmikas, Radzius (Joksas 46), Sernas (Kavaliauskas 77), Panka, Pilibaitis (Kalonas 69), Savenas (Tamosauskas 85), Cesnauskis (Ivaskevicius 69), Velicka (Trakys 46).
Poland: Ciezniak (Przyrowski 46) - Celeben, Jodlowiec, Polczak, Komorowski (Malkowski 46), Pawlowski (Gargula 46), Lukasiewicz, Tralka (Lobodzinski 46), Wilk, Pawel Brozek (Zahorski 69), Boguski.

Sunday, February 8

Feb 8 - Bridgetown
Barbados 5 (Williams 35, 68, McClean 43, Harte 44, Chandler 88)
Grenada 0
HT: 3-0

Tuesday, February 10

Feb 10 - London
Italy 0
Brazil 2 (Elano 12, Robinho 26)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 60,007. **Ref:** Webb (Eng)
Italy: Buffon - Zambrotta, Legrottaglie, Cannavaro, Grosso, De Rossi (Aquilani 58), Pirlo (Dossena 74), Pepe (Camoranesi 46), Montolivo (Perrotta 46), Gilardino (Toni 46), Di Natale (Rossi 46).
Brazil: Julio Cesar - Maicon, Lucio, Juan (Thiago Silva 77), Marcelo, Gilberto Silva (Josue 88), Felipe Melo, Elano (Daniel Alves 79), Ronaldinho, Robinho (Julio Baptista 88), Adriano (Alexandre Pato 80).

Wednesday, February 11

Feb 11 - Blida
Algeria 2 (Ghezzal 36, Ghilas 43)
Benin 1 (Boco 85)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Trabelsi
Algeria: Gaouaoui - Raho (Meftah 15), Bougherra (Abdeslam), Maiza, Belhadj (Zarabi 46), Matmour (Djediat), Mansouri, Lemmouchia, Bezzaz (Hadj Aissa 46), Ghilas (Bouazza), Ghezzal.
Benin: Djidonou - Glele, Olou (Johnson 62), Adenon, Kobena (Boco 46), Chrysostome, Sessegnon, Ahoueya, Adjamossi, Omotoyossi (Maiga 74), Pote.

Feb 11 - Albufeira, Portugal
Andorra 1 (I Lima pen 78)
Lithuania 3 (Velicka 44, Sernas 53, Kavaliauskas 83)
HT: 0-1
Andorra: Koldo - Ayala, I Lima, A Lima, Rubio, Vieira, Pujol, Jimenez, Andorra, Sonejee, Silva.
Lithuania: Karcemarskas (Arlauskis 46) - Paulauskas (Velicka 29), Alunderis, Dedura, Joksas, Sernas (Miceika 64), Tamosauskas (Savenas 46), Semberas, Ivaskevicius, Cesnauskis (Kavaliauskas 58), Danilevicius.

Feb 11 - Bois-Guillaume, France
Angola 0
Mali 4 (S Coulibaly 15, Yatabare 19, Kanoute 34, Seydou Keita 67)
HT: 0-3

Feb 11 - Graz
Austria 0
Sweden 2 (R Elm 58, Kallstrom 63)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 11,800. **Ref:** Kassai (Hun)
Austria: Manninger - Garics (Ibertsberger 46), Prodl, Stranzl (Schiemer 67), Pogatetz, Saumel (Okotie 67), Scharner (Kienzl 83), Holzl, Ivanschitz (Saurer 76), Arnautovic, Janko.
Sweden: Isaksson - Adam Johansson (M Nilsson 46), Mellberg (Granqvist 46), Majstorovic (P Hansson 46), Edman, R Elm, Kallstrom (S Larsson 76), V Elm, Wilhelmsson (Holmen 46), Berg (Nannskog 67), Rosenberg.

Feb 11 - Genk
Belgium 2 (Van Buyten 20, 85)
Slovenia 0
HT: 1-0
Belgium: Stijnen - Simons, Van Buyten, Vanden Borre, Vermaelen (Swerts 44), Defour (Hazard 59), Vertonghen (Simaeys 86), Witsel (Gillet 77), De Camargo, Dembele (De Sutter 82), Mirallas (Martens 46).
Slovenia: S Handanovic - Cesar (Suler 75), Jokic, Brecko, Morec, Komac (Radosavljevic 44), Koren (Ziogar 82), Birsa (Mejac 75), Stevanovic (Sisic 64), Ljubijankic (Dedic 49), Novakovic.

Feb 11 - Le Petit-Quevilly, France
Burkina Faso 1 (Mango 77)
Togo 1 (Pitroipa 32)
HT: 0-1

Feb 11 - Bondoufle, France
Cameroon 3 (Geremi 30, Eto'o 57, 87)
Guinea 1 (Feindouno 82)
HT: 1-0
Cameroon: Kameni (Hamidou 46) - Geremi, Bikey, Song (Binya 58), Assou-Ekoto, Djemba Djemba, Mbami (Essame 90), Makoun (Douala 63), Meyong (Tum 46; Kouemana 90), Eto'o, Somen-Atchoui.
Guinea: Yattara - Balde, Kalabane (Sylla 75), A Diallo, A Camara, K Cisse, Zayatte (Sakho 70), Constant (Johnson 65), Feindouno, Youla, Mansare.

Feb 11 - Pereira
Colombia 2 (Marin 14, Torres 59)
Haiti 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Ruiz (Col)
Colombia: Calero (Ospina) - Zuniga, E Perea, Yepes (Zapata), Armero, Guarin (Aguilar), Vargas, Marin (Toja), Torres (Rodallega), Falcao Garcia, Renteria (Quintero).
Haiti: Domeniche - Mechac, Bertin, Richard, Marcorel, Judelin, Alain, Michel (Corriolan), Sony, Abel (Vaniel), Pierre Louis.

Feb 11 - Cairo
Egypt 2 (Shawky 40, Moteab 83)
Ghana 2 (Appiah pen 52, Tagoe 78)
HT: 1-0
Egypt: El-Hadary - Al-Mohammady, Gomaa, H Said, Fathi, Tawfik (Fathallah), A Hassan, Shawky, Abd Rabou (Barakat), Zidan (Khairy), Zaki (Moteab).
Ghana: Kingson - Paintsil, Akwasi Asare, Quartey, E Addo, Annan, Appiah, Muntari, Kingston, Agogo, Tagoe.

Feb 11 - Antalya, Turkey
Estonia 0
Kazakhstan 2 (Baltiyev 28, 82)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 200. **Ref:** Gocek (Tur)
Estonia: Pareiko (Kotenko 46) - Klavan (Kruglov 46), Piiroja, Rahn (Barengrub 59), Jaager, Dmitrijev, Vassiljev (Vunk 46), Kink, Lindpere (Kams 55), Zenjov (Purje 46), Voskoboinikov.
Kazakhstan: Loria (Mokin 46) - Kirov, Kislitsyn, Abdulin, Erbes, Karpovich, Baltiyev, Nusserbayev, Ostapenko, Baizhanov (Ibrayev 76), Kukejev.

Feb 11 - Marseille
France 0
Argentina 2 (Gutierrez 41, Messi 83)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 60,000. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)
France: Mandanda - Sagna, Gallas, Mexes, Abidal, Toulalan, Gourcuff, L Diarra, Ribery, Henry, Anelka (Benzema 65).
Argentina: Carrizo - Zanetti, Heinze, Demichelis, Papa, Mascherano, M Rodriguez (Angeleri 81), Gutierrez, Gago, Messi, Aguero (Tevez 81).

Feb 11 - Dusseldorf
Germany 0
Norway 1 (Grindheim 63)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 45,000. **Ref:** Messner (Aut)
Germany: Adler - Hinkel (Beck 46), Mertesacker (Tasci 46), Westermann, Lahm, Frings (Marin 68), Ballack, Schweinsteiger, Trochowski (Ozil 78), Klose (Helmes 46), Gomez (Kiessling 68).
Norway: Jarstein - Hogli, Waehler, Hangeland, Bertelsen, Andresen, Braaten (Nevland 87), Grindheim (Stromstad 79), Skjelbred (Huseklepp 87), Gamst Pedersen, Helstad (B H Riise 64).

Feb 11 - Piraeus
Greece 1 (Gekas 61)
Denmark 1 (Borring 49)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Undiano Mallenco (Spa)
Greece: Chalkias (Tzorvas 46) - Seitaridis, Torosidis (Spyropoulos 75), Dellas (Papadopoulos 46), Kyrgiakos (Moras 46), Tziolis, Karagounis, Basinas (Katsouranis 46), Samaras, Haristeas (Limberopoulos 46), Gekas.
Denmark: T Sorensen - Christian Poulsen, Kroldrup, Agger, C Sorensen, Jacobsen (J Poulsen 61), D Jensen (Andreasen 46), Nordstrand (Vingaard 46), Bendtner (Larsen 79), Rommedahl, Borring (Kristensen 82).

Feb 11 - Tel Aviv
Israel 1 (Benayoun 77)
Hungary 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 9,500. **Ref:** Borski
Israel: Awat (Davidovic 46) - Zhiv, Ben Haim, Keinan, Ben Dayan, Ohayon (Saban 46), Benayoun, Alberman, Toama (Buzaglo 62), Colautti (Ben Sahar 46), Golan.
Hungary: Fulop - Szelesi (Szalai 84), Juhasz (Timar 75), Vanczak, Bodor (Halmosi 84), Vadocz (B Toth 65), Gera, Hajnal, Huszti, Dzsudzsak (Rudolf 70), Torghelle.

Feb 11 - Kuwait City
Kuwait 1 (Al-Ansari 32)
Azerbaijan 1 (Dzavadov 1)
HT: 1-1

Feb 11 - Limassol, Cyprus
Latvia 0
Armenia 0
Att: 150
Latvia: Vanins - Klava, Gorkss, Ivanovs, Kacanovs, Visnakovs (Zigajevs 60), Astafjevs, Laizans, Rubins (Solonicins 75), Verpakovskis (Pereplotkins 65), Karlsons (Rudnevs 62).
Armenia: Kasparov - Hovsepyan, Arzumanyan, Tateosyan, Agvan Mkrtchyan, Manucharyan, Artur Voskanyan, Arakelyan, Balabekyan, Henrikh Mkhitaryan, Ara Hakopyan.

Feb 11 - Tripoli
Libya 2 (Esnani 31, Al-Fazzani 57)
Uruguay 3 (Eguren 13, Martinez 70, A Pereira 74)
HT: 1-1
Libya: Aboud - Dawood, Al-Shibani, Shaban, Alsbaay, Mohamed, Masil, Esnani, Abdussalah, Salah, El-Mughrby.
Uruguay: Carini (Viera) - M Pereira (B Silva), Lugano, Godin (Valdez), Caceres, Eguren (J Rodriguez), Gargano, A Pereira, C Rodriguez (Martinez), Suarez, Abreu (Cavani).

Feb 11 - La Manga, Spain
Liechtenstein 0
Iceland 2 (Smarason 28, E Gudjohnsen 47)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 150. **Ref:** Reinert
Liechtenstein: B Buchel - Vogt (R Beck 80), Gerster, Martin Stocklasa, Michael Stocklasa, Fischer, R Buchel, M Buchel (Kieber 46), Burgmeier (Rohrer 46), Frick (S Buchel 85), T Beck (Christen 46).
Iceland: Arason (Gunnleifsson 46) - B Saevarsson, A E Gunnarsson (Danielson 70), I Sigurdsson (Eiriksson 79), R Sigurdsson, Steinsson, Hreidarsson (Palmason 60), B Gunnarsson (T Bjarnason 60), Smarason, Hallfredsson (Solvi Jonsson 60), E Gudjohnsen.

Feb 11 - Antalya, Turkey
Macedonia 1 (Pandev 53)
Moldova 1 (Andronic 62)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 600. **Ref:** Saliy (Kaz)
Macedonia: Milosevski (Pacovski 46) - Noveski (Tasevski 46), Popov (Sikov 46), Sedloski (Mojsov 65), I Mitreski, Grozdanovski (Demiri 46), Sumulikoski (Lazarevski 46), Maznov, Pandev, Trajanov, Stojkov (Petrov 46).
Moldova: Moraru - Lascencov, Golovatenco, Epureanu, Onica (Corneencov 69), Bugaiov, Cebotaru (Manaliu 57), Andronic (Marian 75), Suvorov, Ovseannicov (Alexeev 57), Savinov.

Feb 11 - Casablanca
Morocco 0
Czech Republic 0
Att: 38,000. **Ref:** Alakim (Tun)
Morocco: Zaza - Chretien (Laraichi 46), Erbati, El Kaddouri, El Karkouri, Kharja, Safri (El Ahmadi 64), Dirar, Boussoufa (Hadji 82), Baha (Taarabt 64), El Hamdaoui.
Czech Republic: Drobny - Grygera, Ujfalusi, Rozehnal (Bednar 46), Kadlec (Marek 59), Kovac, Pospech, Polak (Husek 83), Matejovsky (Jarolim 46), Plasil, Baros (Necid 46).

Feb 11 - Maputo
Mozambique 2 (Monteiro 30, Domingues 90)
Malawi 0
HT: 1-0

Back...Eduardo

6 successive games David Villa has now scored in for Spain

CROATIA

Welcome return for Gunners striker

Eduardo returned to the international stage for the first time since his horrific injury for Arsenal against Birmingham last February and set up the winning goal as Croatia beat Romania.

He came off the bench to replace Ivica Olic after 61 minutes and put through Niko Kranjcar for the winner 14 minutes later.

Both teams wore black armbands in honour of Romanian handball player Marian Cozma, who was stabbed to death at a Hungarian nightclub the previous weekend.

PORTUGAL

Braga boy wins first cap but is off target

Braga striker Orlando made his international debut in the 1-0 win over Finland.

The 20-year-old missed a golden opportunity to mark the occasion with a goal as he shot wide when one-on-one with the keeper after being set up by Cristiano Ronaldo.

Debut...Orlando (left)

Feb 11 - London
Nigeria 0
Jamaica 0
Ref: Dean (Eng)
Nigeria: Ejide - Yobo, Taiwo, Shittu, Odiah (K Uche 75), Kanu (Apam 46), Olofinjana, Mikel, Odemwingie, Nsofor, I Uche (Enemaro 87). *Sent off: Taiwo 43min.*
Jamaica: Sawyers - Phillips, Marshall, Mears (Vernan 71), Morrison (Daley 75), D Stewart, J Johnson, Austin, C Davis (Campbell-Ryce 46), Shelton (Wolfe 63), King (Burton 85). *Sent off: J Johnson 43min, Phillips 61min.*

Feb 11 - Lima
Peru 0
Paraguay 1 (Riveros 19)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Buckley
Peru: Heredia - Fernandez, Vilchez, Corzo, Contreras, Quinteros (Ciurlizza 83), M Torres (Barros 75), Marino (D Sanchez 54), De la Haza, Fano, A Sanchez.
Paraguay: Bobadilla - J C Caceres (P Benitez), Caniza (Bonet 46), Morel, Da Silva, Vera, Gonzalez (Veron 53), Martinez (Achucarro 46), Riveros, Cabanas (Bareiro 62), E Benitez (Lopez 62).

Feb 11 - Faro-Loule
Portugal 1 (Cristiano Ronaldo pen 78)
Finland 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Bertolini (Swi)
Portugal: Eduardo (Daniel Fernandes 61) - Miguel (Paulo Ferreira 62), Rolando, Bruno Alves, Duda, Deco, Pepe (Raul Meireles 46), Tiago (Maniche 46), Nani (Danny 77), Hugo Almeida (Orlando 57), Cristiano Ronaldo.
Finland: Jaaskelainen (Maenpaa 46) - Pasanen, Tihinen, Hyypia, Kallio, Johansson, Heikkinen, R Eremenko, Kolkka (Hakola 81), Litmanen (Sjolund 46), Forssell (Kuqi 46).

Feb 11 - Bucharest
Romania 1 (Marica 21)
Croatia 2 (Rakitic 28, Kranjcar 75)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 9,000. **Ref:** Balaj (Rom)
Romania: Lobont (Pantilimon 80) - Contra (Ogararu 46), Tamas, Radoi (Goian 73), Rat (Nesu 46), O Petre, Cocis (Tames 81), Codrea (Bourceanu 71), F Petre (Nicolita 46), Costea (Bucur 61), Marica (Varga 87).
Croatia: Pletikosa - Corluka, Krizanac, Simunic (R Kovac 46), Pranjic (Cale 75), Srna, Modric (Vukojevic 61; Pokrivac 81), Juric, Rakitic, Olic (Eduardo 61), Petric (Kranjcar 46).

Feb 11 - Polokwane
South Africa 0
Chile 2 (Valdivia 45, Sanchez 66)
HT: 0-1
South Africa: Marlin - Gaxa, A Mokoena, Morris, Masilela, Modise (Van Heerden 84), Dikgacoi (Sibaya 73), Tsutsulupa (Parker 46), Tshabalala (Moriri 84), Nkosi (Davids 46), McCarthy (Khenyeza 73).
Chile: Bravo - Isla, Ponce, Estrada, Tello (Jara 46), Carmona (Iturra 85), Vidal, Valdivia (Fernandez 59), Suazo (Hernandez 90), Sanchez, M Gonzalez (Orellana 46).

Feb 11 - Seville
Spain 2 (Villa 36, Llorente 82)
England 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 45,000. **Ref:** Lannoy (Fra)
Spain: Casillas (Reina 46) - Sergio Ramos, Albiol (Marchena 75), Pique, Capdevila (Arbeloa 46), Xavi (Guiza 85), Senna, Xabi Alonso, Iniesta, Fernando Torres (Llorente 64), Villa (Silva 56).
England: James - G Johnson, Jagielka (Upson 46), Terry, A Cole, Wright-Phillips, Carrick, Barry (Lampard 46), Downing (Beckham 46), Heskey (Crouch 46), Agbonlahor (C Cole 75).

Feb 11 - Geneva
Switzerland 1 (Huggel 45)
Bulgaria 1 (Popov 33)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 9,500. **Ref:** Duarte Gomes (Por)
Switzerland: Wolfli - Fernandes, Senderos, Grichting (Djourou 46), Magnin (Ziegler 61), Padalino, Huggel (Dzemaili 61), Inler, Barnetta (Abdi 46), Frei (Yakin 67), Nkufo (Derdiyok 46).
Bulgaria: G Petkov (Ivankov 46) - Manolev, Topuzakov (I Petkov 61), Stoyanov, Milanov, Telkiyski (Todorov 67), Angelov, S Petrov (Kotev 83), Georgiev (Dimitrov 71), Popov (Rangelov 58), Berbatov.

Feb 11 - Dar es Salaam
Tanzania 0
Zimbabwe 0

Feb 11 - Rades
Tunisia 1 (Saihi 66)
Holland 1 (Huntelaar 61)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 17,000. **Ref:** Fattah
Tunisia: Kasraoui - Souissi, Hagui, Jaidi, Jemal, Ben Khalfallah (Tayeb 60), Demal (Ben Yahia 46), Ragued, Saihi (Camus 76), Chermiti (Jemaa 46), Selliti (Belaid 46).
Holland: Stekelenburg - Heitinga (Van der Wiel 84), Mathijsen, Ooijer, Braafheid, Robben, De Jong (Mendes da Silva 59), Sneijder (Van der Vaart 46), Van Bommel (Schaars 59), Van Persie (Babel 46), Kuijt (Huntelaar 46).

Feb 11 - Izmir
Turkey 1 (Gokhan Unal 11)
Ivory Coast 1 (Drogba 90)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Corpodean (Rom)
Turkey: Volkan - Gokhan Gonul (Mehmet Yildiz 75), Servet, Gokhan Zan, Caner, Hamit Altintop (Ayhan 62), Mehmet Aurelio, Tuncay (Emre 46), Arda (Kazim 46), Semih (Sabri 46), Gokhan Unal (Halil Altintop 64).
Ivory Coast: Barry - Demel (Keita 46), K Toure, Gohouri (Bamba 85), Boka, Fae (Gosso 61), Y Toure (Kone 87), Zokora (Sanogo 75), Ndri, Eboue, Drogba.

Feb 11 - Maturin
Venezuela 2 (Maldonado 66, J S Rondon 90)
Guatemala 1 (Pezzarossi 50)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 10,000. **Ref:** Perluzzo (Ven)
Venezuela: Vega - Rosales (Camacho 81), Rey (Velasquez 62), G Cichero (Salazar 46), Fuenmayor, Lucena (Flores 35), Rincon, C Gonzalez (Rojas 46), Vargas (Acosta 74), Maldonado (J S Rondon 89), Moreno.
Guatemala: Trigueno - Flores, L Rodriguez (Noriega 45), Castrillo, Morales, Pappa (Vides 63), Thompson, M Rodriguez, Ramirez (Marquez 85), Pezzarossi (Lopez 69), Brown (Arreola 63).
Sent off: Noriega 59min.

Feb 11 - Vila Real, Portugal
Wales 0
Poland 1 (Guerreiro 80)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Bruno Paixao (Por)
Wales: Hennessey (Myhill 46) - Gunter, Ricketts, Williams, Nyatanga, Bale, Edwards, Collison (Ramsey 46), Bellamy (Cotterill 46), Ledley (Fletcher 46), C Evans (Vokes 46).
Poland: Fabianski (Boruc 46) - Wasilewski, Dudka, Michal Zewlakow, Wawrzyniak, Boguski (Lobodzinski 46), M Lewandowski, Murawski (Tralka 75), Gargula (Guerreiro 46), Krzynowek (Smolarek 46), R Lewandowski (Pawel Brozek 62).

On top...Turkey's Gokhan Zan gets the better of Ivory Coast's Didier Drogba

Nearly fit...Essien

GHANA

Essien ready to return

Chelsea midfielder Michael Essien, who ruptured an anterior cruciate in Ghana's 1-0 World Cup qualifying defeat in Libya last September, has played his first full 90 minutes since sustaining the injury.

After almost six months on the sidelines, the 26-year-old scored on his return in a reserve game for his club side against Aston Villa at the start of March.

KENYA

Hey to coach Stars

Antoine Hey has agreed a two-year contract to lead the Harambee Stars in their quest to reach South Africa.

The much-travelled 38-year-old German coach had been in charge of Liberia since March 2008. He takes over ahead of the 3rd stage of the World Cup qualifiers from former international defender John Bobby Ogolla, who had been doing the job in a caretaker capacity.

TOGO

Thissen in charge

Togo have appointed Jean Thissen as their new coach.

Apart from his native Belgium, the 63-year-old has worked in France, Portugal, Switzerland, Morocco and Tunisia, and coached the Gabon national side.

Thissen succeeds Henri Stambouli of France, who resigned from the position in September, and caretaker Kodjovi Mawuena, who led the Sparrowhawks to a 6-0 victory over Swaziland in the 2nd stage of the World Cup qualifiers.

WORLD CUP GUIDE

QUALIFIERS

AFRICA

6 finals berths (one of which goes automatically to hosts South Africa)

1st stage

The 10 lowest-ranked countries of the 53 entrants were drawn in five two-leg ties. However, the Central African Republic and Sao Tome e Principe, who had been drawn together, both withdrew. FIFA awarded byes to the two highest-ranked countries of the remaining eight – Swaziland and Seychelles – and reordered the draw. The winners advanced to the 2nd stage.

Djibouti v Somalia* 1-0
Madagascar v Comoros Islands 6-2, 4-0 (agg 10-2)
Sierra Leone v Guinea-Bissau 1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
**Decided on a single match, in Djibouti*

2nd stage

The 48 countries** played in 12 round-robin groups, from which the winners and the best eight runners-up*** advanced to the 3rd stage.

***South Africa participated despite having a finals berth guaranteed because the World Cup qualifying campaign doubles as the qualifying campaign for the 2010 African Nations Cup.*
****The runners-up were ranked according to the number of points gained against the teams finishing first and third in their respective groups.*

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cameroon	6	5	1	0	14	2	16
Cape Verde Is	6	3	0	3	7	8	9
Tanzania	6	2	2	2	9	6	8
Mauritius	6	0	1	5	3	17	1

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guinea	6	3	2	1	9	5	11
Kenya+	6	3	1	2	8	5	10
Zimbabwe	6	1	3	2	4	6	6
Namibia	6	2	0	4	7	12	6

Group 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Benin	6	4	0	2	12	8	12
Angola	6	3	1	2	11	8	10
Uganda	6	3	1	2	8	9	10
Niger	6	1	0	5	5	11	3

Group 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria	6	6	0	0	11	1	18
South Africa	6	2	1	3	5	5	7
Sierra Leone	6	2	1	3	4	8	7
Equat Guinea	6	1	0	5	4	10	3

Group 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ghana	6	4	0	2	11	5	12
Gabon+	6	4	0	2	8	3	12
Libya	6	4	0	2	7	4	12
Lesotho	6	0	0	6	2	16	0

Group 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Algeria	6	3	1	2	7	4	10
Gambia	6	2	3	1	6	3	9
Senegal	6	2	3	1	9	7	9
Liberia	6	0	3	3	4	12	3

Group 7

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ivory Coast	6	3	3	0	10	2	12
Mozambique+	6	2	2	2	7	5	8
Madagascar	6	1	3	2	2	7	6
Botswana	6	1	2	3	3	8	5

Group 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco	4	3	0	1	11	5	9
Rwanda+	4	3	0	1	7	3	9
Mauritania	4	0	0	4	2	12	0

Ethiopia excluded because of their federation's non-compliance with a FIFA "roadmap"

Group 9

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Burkina Faso	6	5	1	0	14	5	16
Tunisia+	6	4	1	1	11	3	13
Burundi	6	2	0	4	5	9	6
Seychelles	6	0	0	6	4	17	0

Group 10

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mali	6	4	0	2	13	8	12
Sudan+	6	3	0	3	9	9	9
Congo	6	3	0	3	7	8	9
Chad	6	2	0	4	7	11	6

Group 11

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zambia	4	2	1	1	2	1	7
Togo+	4	2	0	2	8	3	6
Swaziland	4	1	1	2	2	8	4

Eritrea withdrew

Group 12

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt	6	5	0	1	13	2	15
Malawi+	6	4	0	2	14	5	12
DR Congo	6	3	0	3	14	6	9
Djibouti	6	0	0	6	2	30	0

+ Qualified as one of the best eight runners-up

3rd stage

The 20 countries have been drawn in five round-robin groups, the winners of which will qualify for the finals.

Group A

28.03.09	Morocco-Gabon
28.03.09	Togo-Cameroon
06.06.09	Cameroon-Morocco
06.06.09	Gabon-Togo
20.06.09	Gabon-Cameroon
20.06.09	Morocco-Togo
05.09.09	Cameroon-Gabon
05.09.09	Togo-Morocco
10.10.09	Cameroon-Togo
10.10.09	Gabon-Morocco
14.11.09	Morocco-Cameroon
14.11.09	Togo-Gabon

Group B

28.03.09	Kenya-Tunisia
29.03.09	Mozambique-Nigeria
06.06.09	Nigeria-Kenya
06.06.09	Tunisia-Mozambique
20.06.09	Kenya-Mozambique
20.06.09	Tunisia-Nigeria
05.09.09	Mozambique-Kenya
05.09.09	Nigeria-Tunisia
10.10.09	Nigeria-Mozambique
10.10.09	Tunisia-Kenya
14.11.09	Kenya-Nigeria
14.11.09	Mozambique-Tunisia

Group C

28.03.09	Rwanda-Algeria
29.03.09	Egypt-Zambia
06.06.09	Algeria-Egypt
06.06.09	Zambia-Rwanda
10.06.09	Egypt-Rwanda
20.06.09	Zambia-Algeria
05.09.09	Algeria-Zambia
05.09.09	Rwanda-Egypt
10.10.09	Algeria-Rwanda
10.10.09	Zambia-Egypt
14.11.09	Egypt-Algeria
14.11.09	Rwanda-Zambia

Group D

28.03.09	Sudan-Mali
29.03.09	Ghana-Benin
06.06.09	Benin-Sudan
06.06.09	Mali-Ghana
20.06.09	Mali-Benin
20.06.09	Sudan-Ghana
05.09.09	Benin-Mali
05.09.09	Ghana-Sudan
10.10.09	Benin-Ghana
10.10.09	Mali-Sudan
14.11.09	Ghana-Mali
14.11.09	Sudan-Benin

Group E

28.03.09	Burkina Faso-Guinea
29.03.09	Ivory Coast-Malawi
06.06.09	Guinea-Ivory Coast
06.06.09	Malawi-Burkina Faso
20.06.09	Burkina Faso-Ivory Coast
20.06.09	Guinea-Malawi
05.09.09	Ivory Coast-Burkina Faso
05.09.09	Malawi-Guinea
10.10.09	Guinea-Burkina Faso
10.10.09	Malawi-Ivory Coast
14.11.09	Burkina Faso-Malawi
14.11.09	Ivory Coast-Guinea

ASIA

4.5 finals berths

1st stage

The 38 lowest-ranked countries of the 43 entrants were drawn in 19 two-leg ties. The eight lowest-ranked winners entered the 2nd stage; the other 11 winners went straight into the 3rd stage, to which Asia's top five seeds – Australia, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Japan and Iran – received a bye.

Bahrain v Malaysia 4-1, 0-0 (agg 4-1)
Bangladesh v Tajikistan 1-1, 0-5 (agg 1-6)
*Bhutan v Kuwait
Cambodia v Turkmenistan 0-1, 1-4 (agg 1-5)
China v Myanmar 7-0, 4-0 (agg 11-0)
East Timor v Hong Kong 2-3, 1-8 (agg 3-11)
**Guam v Indonesia
Kyrgyzstan v Jordan 2-0, 0-2 (aet) (agg 2-2; Jordan 6-5 on pens)
Lebanon v India 4-1, 2-2 (agg 6-3)
Mongolia v North Korea 1-4, 1-5 (agg 2-9)
Oman v Nepal 2-0, 2-0 (agg 4-0)
Pakistan v Iraq 0-7, 0-0 (agg 0-7)
Palestine v Singapore 0-4, 0-3 (awarded) (agg 0-7)
Sri Lanka v Qatar 0-1, 0-5 (agg 0-6)
Syria v Afghanistan 3-0, 2-1 (agg 5-1)
Thailand v Macao 6-1, 7-1 (agg 13-2)
Uzbekistan v Taiwan 9-0, 2-0 (agg 11-0)
Vietnam v United Arab Emirates 0-1, 0-5 (agg 0-6)
Yemen v Maldives 3-0, 0-2 (agg 3-2)

**Bhutan withdrew; Kuwait were given a bye*
***Guam withdrew; Indonesia were given a bye*

2nd stage

The eight lowest-ranked 1st stage winners were drawn in four two-leg ties, the winners of which advanced to the 3rd stage.

Hong Kong v Turkmenistan 0-0, 0-3 (agg 0-3)
Indonesia v Syria 1-4, 0-7 (agg 1-11)
Singapore v Tajikistan 2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1)
Yemen v Thailand 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)

3rd stage

The 20 countries played in five round-robin groups. The group winners and runners-up advanced to the 4th stage.

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Australia	6	3	1	2	7	3	10
Qatar	6	3	1	2	5	6	10
Iraq	6	2	1	3	4	6	7
China	6	1	3	2	3	4	6

Seeing red...Yorke

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Veteran Soca Warrior forced to sit out

Dwight Yorke will miss his country's next two qualifiers – at home to Honduras on March 28 and away to the US on April 1 – and could be out for up to four games.

The highly experienced 37-year-old Sunderland striker was shown a straight red card in the fourth minute of added time in the 2-2 draw with El Salvador in February. He had already been booked during the game.

AUSTRIA

Bruckner gone

Former Czech Republic boss Karel Bruckner has stepped down as coach of Austria.

The 69-year-old had overseen a disappointing start to the country's World Cup qualifying campaign.

His assistant Andreas Herzog, Austria's most experienced player with 103 caps, resigned a day later after learning he would not be considered for the job. "I was asked to stay on as assistant but I refused," said Herzog.

Dietmar Konstantini, who was caretaker for three games in the 1990s, will take over from Bruckner.

All over...Bruckner

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Japan	6	4	1	1	12	3	13
Bahrain	6	3	2	1	7	5	11
Oman	6	2	2	2	5	7	8
Thailand	6	0	1	5	5	14	1

Group 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Korea	6	3	3	0	10	3	12
North Korea	6	3	3	0	4	0	12
Jordan	6	2	1	3	6	6	7
Turkmenistan	6	0	1	5	1	12	1

Group 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saudi Arabia	6	5	0	1	14	5	15
Uzbekistan	6	5	0	1	15	7	15
Singapore	6	2	0	4	7	13	6
Lebanon	6	0	0	6	3	14	0

Group 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran	6	3	3	0	7	2	12
UAE	6	2	2	2	7	7	8
Syria	6	2	2	2	7	8	8
Kuwait	6	1	1	4	8	12	4

4th stage

The 10 countries are playing in two round-robin groups, from which the winners and runners-up will qualify for the finals. The two third-placed countries will meet in a two-leg play-off, the winners of which will meet the Oceania section winners in a two-leg tie for a place in the finals.

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Australia	4	3	1	0	6	0	10
Japan	4	2	2	0	7	3	8
Bahrain	4	1	1	2	4	5	4
Qatar	4	1	1	2	4	8	4
Uzbekistan	4	0	1	3	1	6	1

Remaining games

28.03.09 Japan-Bahrain
28.03.09 Uzbekistan-Qatar
01.04.09 Australia-Uzbekistan
01.04.09 Bahrain-Qatar
06.06.09 Qatar-Australia
06.06.09 Uzbekistan-Japan
10.06.09 Australia-Bahrain
10.06.09 Japan-Qatar
17.06.09 Australia-Japan
17.06.09 Bahrain-Uzbekistan

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Korea	4	2	2	0	8	3	8
North Korea	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
Iran	4	1	3	0	5	4	6
Saudi Arabia	4	1	1	2	3	5	4
UAE	4	0	1	3	4	9	1

Remaining games

28.03.09 Iran-Saudi Arabia
28.03.09 North Korea-UAE
01.04.09 Saudi Arabia-UAE
01.04.09 South Korea-North Korea
06.06.09 North Korea-Iran
06.06.09 UAE-South Korea
10.06.09 Iran-UAE
10.06.09 South Korea-Saudi Arabia
17.06.09 Saudi Arabia-North Korea
17.06.09 South Korea-Iran

CONCACAF

3.5 finals berths

1st stage

The 22 lowest-ranked countries of the 35 entrants were drawn in 11 two-leg ties (however, three of the games – Dominican Republic v Puerto Rico, Surinam v Montserrat and US Virgin Islands v Grenada – were then made single-leg ties only, because several of those countries did not have a stadium that met FIFA criteria). The winners advanced to the 2nd stage, to which the 13 highest-ranked countries received a bye.

Aruba v Antigua & Barbuda 0-3, 0-1 (agg 0-4)
Bahamas v British Virgin Islands 1-1, 2-2 (agg 3-3; Bahamas on away goals)
Belize v St Kitts & Nevis 3-1, 1-1 (agg 4-2)
Bermuda v Cayman Islands 1-1, 3-1 (agg 4-2)
Dominica v Barbados 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)
El Salvador v Anguilla 12-0, 4-0 (agg 16-0)
Grenada v US Virgin Islands* 10-0
Montserrat v Surinam* 1-7
Nicaragua v Dutch Antilles 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3)
Puerto Rico v Dominican Republic* 1-0 (aet)
Turks & Caicos Islands v St Lucia 2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3)

**Single-leg games*

2nd stage

The 24 countries were drawn in 12 two-leg ties, the winners of which advanced to the 3rd stage.

Antigua & Barbuda v Cuba 3-4, 0-4 (agg 3-8)
Belize v Mexico 0-2, 0-7 (agg 0-9)
Grenada v Costa Rica 2-2, 0-3 (agg 2-5)
Guatemala v St Lucia 6-0, 3-1 (agg 9-1)
Haiti v Dutch Antilles 0-0, 1-0 (agg 1-0)
Honduras v Puerto Rico 4-0, 2-2 (agg 6-2)
Jamaica v Bahamas 7-0, 6-0 (agg 13-0)
Panama v El Salvador 1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3)
St Vincent & The Grenadines v Canada 0-3, 1-4 (agg 1-7)
Surinam v Guyana 1-0, 2-1 (agg 3-1)
Trinidad & Tobago v Bermuda 1-2, 2-0 (agg 3-2)
United States v Barbados 8-0, 1-0 (agg 9-0)

3rd stage

The 12 countries played in three round-robin groups, from which the winners and runners-up advanced to the 4th stage.

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
United States	6	5	0	1	14	3	15
Trinidad & Tob	6	3	2	1	9	6	11
Guatemala	6	1	2	3	6	7	5
Cuba	6	1	0	5	5	18	3

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Honduras	6	4	0	2	9	5	12
Mexico	6	3	1	2	9	6	10
Jamaica	6	3	1	2	6	6	10
Canada	6	0	2	4	6	13	2

Group 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Costa Rica	6	6	0	0	20	3	18
El Salvador	6	3	1	2	11	4	10
Haiti	6	0	3	3	4	13	3
Surinam	6	0	2	4	4	19	2

4th stage

The six countries are playing in a single round-robin group. The top three will qualify for the finals. The fourth-placed country will meet the fifth-placed South American country in a two-leg tie for a place in the finals.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Costa Rica	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
United States	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Trinidad & Tob	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
El Salvador	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Honduras	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Mexico	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

Remaining games

28.03.09 El Salvador-United States
28.03.09 Mexico-Costa Rica
28.03.09 Trinidad & Tob-Honduras
01.04.09 Costa Rica-El Salvador
01.04.09 Honduras-Mexico
01.04.09 United States-Trinidad & Tob
03.06.09 Costa Rica-United States
06.06.09 El Salvador-Mexico
06.06.09 Trinidad & Tob-Costa Rica
06.06.09 United States-Honduras
10.06.09 Honduras-El Salvador
10.06.09 Mexico-Trinidad & Tob
12.08.09 Honduras-Costa Rica
12.08.09 Mexico-United States
12.08.09 Trinidad & Tob-El Salvador
05.09.09 Costa Rica-Mexico
05.09.09 Honduras-Trinidad & Tob
05.09.09 United States-El Salvador
09.09.09 El Salvador-Costa Rica
09.09.09 Mexico-Honduras
09.09.09 Trinidad & Tob-United States
10.10.09 Costa Rica-Trinidad & Tob
10.10.09 Honduras-United States
10.10.09 Mexico-El Salvador
14.10.09 El Salvador-Honduras
14.10.09 Trinidad & Tob-Mexico
14.10.09 United States-Costa Rica

EUROPE

13 finals berths

The 53 countries are playing in nine round-robin groups, the winners of which will qualify for the finals. The best eight runners-up* will be drawn in four two-leg play-off ties, the winners of which will also qualify for the finals.

**The runners-up will be ranked according to the number of points gained against the teams finishing first, third, fourth and fifth in their respective groups.*

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Denmark	3	2	1	0	6	2	7
Hungary	4	2	1	1	4	2	7
Albania	5	1	3	1	3	2	6
Portugal	4	1	2	1	6	3	5
Sweden	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
Malta	5	0	1	4	0	11	1

Remaining games

28.03.09 Albania-Hungary
28.03.09 Malta-Denmark
28.03.09 Portugal-Sweden
01.04.09 Denmark-Albania
01.04.09 Hungary-Malta
06.06.09 Albania-Portugal
06.06.09 Sweden-Denmark
10.06.09 Sweden-Malta
05.09.09 Denmark-Portugal
05.09.09 Hungary-Sweden
09.09.09 Albania-Denmark
09.09.09 Hungary-Portugal
09.09.09 Malta-Sweden
10.10.09 Denmark-Sweden
10.10.09 Portugal-Hungary
14.10.09 Denmark-Hungary
14.10.09 Portugal-Malta
14.10.09 Sweden-Albania

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Greece	4	3	0	1	9	2	9
Israel	4	2	2	0	8	5	8
Switzerland	4	2	1	1	7	6	7
Latvia	4	1	1	2	4	6	4
Luxembourg	4	1	1	2	3	7	4
Moldova	4	0	1	3	2	7	1

Remaining games

28.03.09 Israel-Greece
28.03.09 Luxembourg-Latvia
28.03.09 Moldova-Switzerland
01.04.09 Greece-Israel
01.04.09 Latvia-Luxembourg
01.04.09 Switzerland-Moldova
05.09.09 Israel-Latvia
05.09.09 Moldova-Luxembourg
05.09.09 Switzerland-Greece
09.09.09 Israel-Luxembourg
09.09.09 Latvia-Switzerland
09.09.09 Moldova-Greece
10.10.09 Greece-Latvia
10.10.09 Israel-Moldova
10.10.09 Luxembourg-Switzerland
14.10.09 Greece-Luxembourg
14.10.09 Latvia-Moldova
14.10.09 Switzerland-Israel

Group 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slovakia	4	3	0	1	8	5	9
N Ireland	5	2	1	2	8	4	7
Czech Rep	4	2	1	1	5	2	7
Poland	4	2	1	1	6	4	7
Slovenia	4	2	1	1	5	3	7
San Marino	5	0	0	5	1	15	0

Remaining games

28.03.09 Northern Ireland-Poland
28.03.09 Slovenia-Czech Rep
01.04.09 Czech Rep-Slovakia
01.04.09 Northern Ireland-Slovenia
01.04.09 Poland-San Marino
06.06.09 Slovakia-San Marino
12.08.09 Slovenia-San Marino
05.09.09 Poland-Northern Ireland
05.09.09 Slovakia-Czech Rep
09.09.09 Czech Rep-San Marino
09.09.09 Northern Ireland-Slovakia
09.09.09 Slovenia-Poland
10.10.09 Czech Rep-Poland
10.10.09 Slovakia-Slovenia
14.10.09 Czech Rep-Northern Ireland

POLAND

Beenhakker agrees to help Feyenoord

Poland's national coach Leo Beenhakker has taken a second job, working in an unpaid role as technical adviser at Feyenoord.

"I've never made a secret of the fact that Feyenoord is in my blood," said the man who was born in Rotterdam.

"That's why it never occurred to me to say no. Given the Poland team's schedule, my free time is pretty flexible so I can combine these functions."

His announcement came just days after Russia's national coach Guus Hiddink agreed to combine his job with looking after English Premier League side Chelsea.

Both men have said they will give up the club roles at the end of the season.

PERU

End of the ban

Werder Bremen striker Claudio Pizarro has said he still wants to play for Peru, despite falling out with coach Jose Del Solar and the national federation.

Although he was left out of Peru's friendly defeat against Paraguay in February, Pizarro – along with Schalke's Jefferson Farfan and Santiagc Acasiete of Spain's Almeria – has now completed a commuted three-month ban.

The trio were originally suspended after they were alleged to have been involved in a party at the team hotel following the 1-1 draw in a World Cup qualifier against Brazil in November 2007.

Available...Pizarro

18 months Pizarro was originally banned for

14.10.09 Poland-Slovakia
14.10.09 San Marino-Slovenia

Group 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany	4	3	1	0	12	4	10
Russia	3	2	0	1	6	3	6
Wales	4	2	0	2	4	3	6
Finland	3	1	1	1	4	6	4
Azerbaijan	3	0	1	2	0	2	1
Liechtenstein	3	0	1	2	0	8	1

Remaining games
28.03.09 Germany-Liechtenstein
28.03.09 Russia-Azerbaijan
28.03.09 Wales-Finland
01.04.09 Liechtenstein-Russia
01.04.09 Wales-Germany
06.06.09 Azerbaijan-Wales
06.06.09 Finland-Liechtenstein
10.06.09 Finland-Russia
12.08.09 Azerbaijan-Germany
05.09.09 Azerbaijan-Finland
05.09.09 Russia-Liechtenstein
09.09.09 Germany-Azerbaijan
09.09.09 Liechtenstein-Finland
09.09.09 Wales-Russia
10.10.09 Finland-Wales
10.10.09 Liechtenstein-Azerbaijan
10.10.09 Russia-Germany
14.10.09 Azerbaijan-Russia
14.10.09 Germany-Finland
14.10.09 Liechtenstein-Wales

Group 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	4	4	0	0	10	1	12
Turkey	4	2	2	0	5	2	8
Belgium	4	2	1	1	7	5	7
Bosnia-Herz	4	2	0	2	12	4	6
Estonia	4	0	1	3	2	13	1
Armenia	4	0	0	4	1	12	0

Remaining games
28.03.09 Armenia-Estonia
28.03.09 Belgium-Bosnia-Herzegovina
28.03.09 Spain-Turkey
01.04.09 Bosnia-Herzegovina-Belgium
01.04.09 Estonia-Armenia
01.04.09 Turkey-Spain
05.09.09 Armenia-Bosnia-Herzegovina
05.09.09 Spain-Belgium
05.09.09 Turkey-Estonia
09.09.09 Armenia-Belgium
09.09.09 Bosnia-Herzegovina-Turkey
09.09.09 Spain-Estonia
10.10.09 Armenia-Spain
10.10.09 Belgium-Turkey
10.10.09 Estonia-Bosnia-Herzegovina
14.10.09 Bosnia-Herzegovina-Spain
14.10.09 Estonia-Belgium
14.10.09 Turkey-Armenia

Group 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England	4	4	0	0	14	3	12
Croatia	4	2	1	1	8	4	7
Ukraine	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Belarus	3	1	0	2	4	5	3
Kazakhstan	4	1	0	3	5	11	3
Andorra	4	0	0	4	1	12	0

Remaining games
01.04.09 Andorra-Croatia
01.04.09 England-Ukraine
01.04.09 Kazakhstan-Belarus
06.06.09 Belarus-Andorra
06.06.09 Croatia-Ukraine
06.06.09 Kazakhstan-England
10.06.09 England-Andorra
10.06.09 Ukraine-Kazakhstan
12.08.09 Belarus-Croatia
05.09.09 Croatia-Belarus
05.09.09 Ukraine-Andorra
09.09.09 Andorra-Kazakhstan
09.09.09 Belarus-Ukraine
09.09.09 England-Croatia
10.10.09 Belarus-Kazakhstan
10.10.09 Ukraine-England
14.10.09 Andorra-Ukraine
14.10.09 England-Belarus
14.10.09 Kazakhstan-Croatia

Group 7

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Serbia	4	3	0	1	9	3	9
Lithuania	4	3	0	1	6	3	9
France	3	1	1	1	5	6	4
Austria	4	1	1	2	5	7	4
Romania	3	1	1	1	3	5	4
Faroe Islands	4	0	1	3	1	5	1

Remaining games
28.03.09 Lithuania-France
28.03.09 Romania-Serbia
01.04.09 Austria-Romania
01.04.09 France-Lithuania
06.06.09 Lithuania-Romania
06.06.09 Serbia-Austria
10.06.09 Faroe Islands-Serbia
12.08.09 Faroe Islands-France
05.09.09 Austria-Faroe Islands
05.09.09 France-Romania
09.09.09 Faroe Islands-Lithuania
09.09.09 Romania-Austria
09.09.09 Serbia-France
10.10.09 Austria-Lithuania
10.10.09 France-Faroe Islands
10.10.09 Serbia-Romania
14.10.09 France-Austria
14.10.09 Lithuania-Serbia
14.10.09 Romania-Faroe Islands

Group 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Italy	4	3	1	0	6	2	10
Rep Ireland	4	3	1	0	5	2	10
Bulgaria	3	0	3	0	2	2	3
Montenegro	3	0	2	1	3	4	2
Georgia	5	0	2	3	3	7	2
Cyprus	3	0	1	2	2	4	1

Remaining games
28.03.09 Cyprus-Georgia
28.03.09 Montenegro-Italy
28.03.09 Rep Ireland-Bulgaria
01.04.09 Bulgaria-Cyprus
01.04.09 Georgia-Montenegro
01.04.09 Italy-Rep Ireland
06.06.09 Bulgaria-Rep Ireland
06.06.09 Cyprus-Montenegro
05.09.09 Bulgaria-Montenegro
05.09.09 Cyprus-Rep Ireland
05.09.09 Georgia-Italy
09.09.09 Italy-Bulgaria
09.09.09 Montenegro-Cyprus
10.10.09 Cyprus-Bulgaria
10.10.09 Montenegro-Georgia
10.10.09 Rep Ireland-Italy
14.10.09 Bulgaria-Georgia
14.10.09 Italy-Cyprus
14.10.09 Rep Ireland-Montenegro

Group 9

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holland	3	3	0	0	5	1	9
Scotland	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Iceland	4	1	1	2	4	6	4
Macedonia	3	1	0	2	2	3	3
Norway	3	0	2	1	2	3	2

Remaining games
28.03.09 Holland-Scotland
01.04.09 Holland-Macedonia
01.04.09 Scotland-Iceland
06.06.09 Iceland-Holland
06.06.09 Macedonia-Norway
10.06.09 Holland-Norway
10.06.09 Macedonia-Iceland
12.08.09 Norway-Scotland
05.09.09 Iceland-Norway
05.09.09 Scotland-Macedonia
09.09.09 Norway-Macedonia
09.09.09 Scotland-Holland

OCEANIA

0.5 finals berths

1st stage

The nine-lowest ranked countries of the 10 entrants* played a preliminary qualifying competition. The countries finishing first, second and third advanced to the 2nd stage, to which New Zealand, Oceania's highest-ranked country, received a bye.

Played in Apia, Samoa

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fiji	4	3	1	0	25	1	10
New Caledonia	4	3	1	0	6	1	10
Tahiti	4	1	1	2	2	6	4
Cook Islands	4	1	0	3	4	9	3
Tuvalu	4	0	1	3	2	22	1

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Solomon Is	4	4	0	0	21	1	12
Vanuatu	4	3	0	1	23	3	9
Samoa	4	2	0	2	9	8	6
Tonga	4	1	0	3	6	10	3
Amer. Samoa	4	0	0	4	1	38	0

Semi-finals

05.09.07 Solomon Is-New Caledonia..... 2-3
05.09.07 Fiji-Vanuatu..... 3-0

Third-place play-off

07.09.07 Solomon Is-Vanuatu..... 0-2

Final

07.09.07 New Caledonia-Fiji..... 1-0

**Tuvalu are not members of FIFA and could not enter the World Cup qualifying competition; they participated in the 1st stage tournament because it doubled as the South Pacific Games football competition.*

2nd stage

The four countries played in a single round-robin group. As group winners, New Zealand will meet the fifth-best Asian country in a two-leg tie for a place in the finals.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
New Zealand	6	5	0	1	14	5	15
New Caledonia	6	2	2	2	12	10	8
Fiji	6	2	1	3	8	11	7
Vanuatu	6	1	1	4	5	13	4

SOUTH AMERICA

4.5 finals berths

The 10 countries are playing in a single round-robin group. The top four will qualify for the finals. The fifth-placed country will meet the fourth-placed CONCACAF country in a two-leg tie for a place in the finals.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Paraguay	10	7	2	1	18	6	23
Brazil	10	4	5	1	15	4	17
Argentina	10	4	4	2	13	7	16
Chile	10	5	1	4	14	13	16
Uruguay	10	3	4	3	19	10	13
Ecuador	10	3	3	4	12	17	12
Colombia	10	2	5	3	4	8	11
Venezuela	10	3	1	6	12	18	10
Bolivia	10	2	3	5	13	22	9
Peru	10	1	4	5	5	20	7

Remaining games
28.03.09 Argentina-Venezuela
28.03.09 Colombia-Bolivia
28.03.09 Uruguay-Paraguay
29.03.09 Ecuador-Brazil
29.03.09 Peru-Chile
31.03.09 Brazil-Peru
31.03.09 Venezuela-Colombia
01.04.09 Bolivia-Argentina
01.04.09 Chile-Uruguay
01.04.09 Ecuador-Paraguay
06.06.09 Argentina-Colombia
06.06.09 Bolivia-Venezuela
06.06.09 Paraguay-Chile
06.06.09 Peru-Ecuador
06.06.09 Uruguay-Brazil
10.06.09 Brazil-Paraguay
10.06.09 Chile-Bolivia
10.06.09 Colombia-Peru
10.06.09 Ecuador-Argentina
10.06.09 Venezuela-Uruguay
05.09.09 Argentina-Brazil
05.09.09 Chile-Venezuela
05.09.09 Colombia-Ecuador
05.09.09 Paraguay-Bolivia
05.09.09 Peru-Uruguay
09.09.09 Bolivia-Ecuador
09.09.09 Brazil-Chile
09.09.09 Paraguay-Argentina
09.09.09 Uruguay-Colombia
09.09.09 Venezuela-Peru
10.10.09 Argentina-Peru
10.10.09 Bolivia-Brazil
10.10.09 Colombia-Chile
10.10.09 Ecuador-Uruguay
10.10.09 Venezuela-Paraguay
14.10.09 Brazil-Venezuela
14.10.09 Chile-Ecuador
14.10.09 Paraguay-Colombia
14.10.09 Peru-Bolivia
14.10.09 Uruguay-Argentina

AUSTRALIA

Melbourne triumph in Grand Final

ON AUSTRALIA'S societal landscape nothing throbs with more intensity than the rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne, the country's two biggest cities. The mutual dislike is up there with that of Madrid and Barcelona in Spain, or Paris and Marseille in France.

But, because Melbourne's religion is Aussie rules football and Sydney is a rugby league town, that rivalry has rarely manifested itself in sport. That is until the A-League was launched in 2005 and teams with an equal sense of ambition, snobbery and one-upmanship were planted in each city.

Although Sydney FC galloped away with the honours in the opening year, winning the title under coach Pierre Littbarski and with the decorated Dwight Yorke in their squad, the mantle of being Australia's leading club side has pretty much been held by Melbourne Victory ever since.

At the end of February, Victory became the first club to win a second A-League championship, adding to the title they won in splendid style in 2007. Indeed, the Melbourne honour roll for season 2008-09 makes decidedly unpleasant reading in Sydney.

Melbourne won the title in a drama-filled Grand Final against Adelaide United, finished top of the league table, won the pre-season tournament, scored the most goals and attracted the biggest crowds (which were almost double those of Sydney).

By contrast Sydney had a miserable season, finishing out of the play-offs in fifth place – which in an eight-team league is an embarrassment – and watched by the lowest number of fans in their short history. And this despite a high-calibre squad of players and playing to the country's biggest market.

Sydney spent most of the season trying to avoid bad press brought on by poor results, below-par performances by star player John Aloisi and the controversial behaviour of coach John Kosmina, the ex-Socceroo captain.

Before the season ended the club was taken over by Russian magnate David Traktovenko, who found himself having to choose between Kosmina and Aloisi after they fell out. Kosmina, who has a habit of creating bad headlines by confronting referees, opposing coaches and journalists, was shown the door and Aloisi, on a salary of £630,000 (which is the highest in any code of football in Australia), was retained.

Double the joy...Archie Thompson (left) and Kevin Muscat celebrate Victory's second Grand Final success

Traktovenko, who is a previous owner of Zenit St Petersburg, promises a new broom with the appointment of ex-Sparta Prague boss Vitezslav Lavickan and the recruitment of at least four new players.

Meanwhile Melbourne Victory are basking in their success and in their reputation as the most stable club in the country.

In fact the league season last year was dominated not by Melbourne's traditional rivalry with Sydney but with the challenge of Adelaide United, who also had a stellar season, advancing to the Final of the Asian Champions League (which they lost to Gamba Osaka), finishing second in the league table only on goal difference and making the Grand Final at Melbourne's Telstra Dome.

Melbourne's 1-0 win in the decider, in front of over 53,000 fans, was blemished only by the fact that Adelaide's Brazilian import Cristiano was wrongly sent off after 10 minutes for alleged elbowing.

Now Melbourne can look forward to playing in the Asian Champions League in 2010, as can Adelaide who also qualified by reaching the Grand Final.

Adelaide's splendid run in the ACL last year created huge interest in Australia and established participation in the tournament as the ultimate prize for clubs in the A-League, much like the role the UEFA Champions League plays in the ambitions of European clubs.

Chance at redemption

The Champions League's new-found status presents a chance at redemption for Newcastle Jets who had a horror season, finishing in last place but still playing in the ACL this year after winning the league in 2008.

The plight of Jets in the last campaign has highlighted one area of major concern that troubles the fledgling A-League: the salary cap.

Just as Michel Platini is calling for some kind of ceiling on salaries in Europe, in Australia the mood is the reverse with the existing cap a subject of much debate and sporadic calls for its demise. The main problem, as Jets found out over the past 12 months, is that it renders the A-League uncompetitive with other leagues which don't have a cap.

Jets lost the bulk of the playing staff with which they won the league just over a year ago with many of them going to other leagues in Asia. While Australians have long been used to their best players moving to Europe, and have valued the experience the players have gained as a trade-off, emigration to leagues which are richer but not necessarily better than the A-League is a new worry.

The talent drain to Asian leagues has accelerated in the past couple of years primarily because the A-League cap which stands at a measly £900,000 for a squad of 20 players and prohibits clubs from matching foreign wages. The AFC's recently introduced three-plus-one quota rule

Melbourne won the title in a drama-filled Grand Final, scored the most goals and attracted the biggest crowds

in the Champions League, which allows four foreigners per club provided at least one of them is from an AFC country, has further encouraged clubs in Asia to pluck the best players from the A-League.

A small remedy for this is the "marquee player" rule by which each club is allowed to sign one star player outside the cap and pay him whatever they wish. It is this rule which allowed the new league franchise Gold Coast United, who will join the league next season, to bring home Jason Culina, the current PSV Eindhoven midfielder who is still in his playing prime.

However, such cases are likely to remain rare if players are to maintain their hopes of playing for the national side. Australia coach Pim Verbeek greeted the news of Culina's homecoming by saying the player has reduced his chances of playing in the World Cup by leaving the Eredivisie and opting to play in the A-League.

Attendances were down on the previous season following three years of solid growth but this doesn't appear to worry the league authorities who argue that it is probably a case of natural post-honeymoon plateauing. One thing that is certain to ignite new interest in the league is its expansion from eight to 10 teams next season.

The two new franchises are Gold Coast United and North Queensland Fury, bringing the sunshine state's complement, with the existing Queensland Roar, to three clubs. The newcomers have already made headlines with player recruitments – Fury snapping up former England and Liverpool striker Robbie Fowler.

And Football Federation Australia will not stop there, having already pledged to raise the number to 12 teams in 2011 and possibly 14 the following year. ●

Les Murray

Showdown...Aloisi and Kosmina

A-LEAGUE 2009

Inspirational...Hernandez

LEAGUE STAGE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Melbourne	21	12	2	7	39	27	38
Adelaide	21	11	5	5	31	19	38
Queensland	21	10	6	5	36	25	36
Central Coast	21	7	7	7	35	32	28
Sydney	21	7	5	9	33	32	26
Wellington	21	7	5	9	23	31	26
Perth	21	6	4	11	31	44	22
Newcastle	21	4	6	11	21	39	18

Top four qualified for play-offs

CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS

Minor semi-final

1st leg - Feb 6; 2nd leg - Feb 13

Central Coast v Queensland

0-2, 1-2 (agg 1-4)

Major semi-final

1st leg - Feb 7; 2nd leg - Feb 14

Adelaide v Melbourne

0-2, 0-4 (agg 0-6)

Preliminary final

Feb 21: Adelaide 1 Queensland 0 (single tie)

Grand Final

Feb 28 - Melbourne

Melbourne 1 (Pondeljak 60)

Adelaide 0

HT: 0-0. **Att:** 53,273. **Ref:** Breeze

Sent off: Cristiano (Adelaide) 10min; Allsopp (Melbourne) 65min

PLAYER OF THE SEASON

Carlos Hernandez

(Melbourne Victory)

The Costa Rica international was the creative turbine of the Melbourne Victory attack and their key player. A crowd pleaser with excellent technique, incisive passing and a thumping right foot shot, Hernandez proved essential in unlocking defences and the only time Victory seemed to struggle was when he was not on the field.

Future star...Kantarovski

REVELATION OF THE SEASON

Ben Kantarovski

(Newcastle Jets)

A fabulous all-round talent who only tuned 17 in January, Kantarovski began the season in the youth team but ended up playing in 13 of Newcastle's 21 games (and starting in every one of those). During the season he appeared as an attacking midfielder, a holding midfielder and at centre back, and he is surely destined to gain his first senior international cap before his 20th birthday.

COACH OF THE SEASON

Aurelio Vidmar

(Adelaide United)

Maligned for his defensive tactics, Vidmar claimed plaudits for a wonderful run to the Asian Champions League Final against Gamba Osaka and a place in the Club World Cup. Managing that distraction and still finishing second in the league while making the Grand Final earned the league's youngest coach (42) the manager of the year title from his peers.

Les Murray

Top boss...Vidmar

EUROPE Milan crash out of UEFA Cup

DAVID BECKHAM made his UEFA Cup debut when Milan met Werder Bremen in the "Round of 32" but the Italian side went out of the competition after two late goals at San Siro from on-loan Chelsea misfit Claudio Pizarro sent the German side through on away goals.

Milan had appeared comfortable when first-half goals from Andrea Pirlo and Alexandre Pato in the second leg gave them a 3-1 aggregate lead with just 45 minutes to play. But Pizarro twice headed past Dida to set up a meeting with St Etienne in the last 16.

Milan were not the only big-name casualties as Valencia surprisingly lost to Dynamo Kyiv despite having drawn the opening leg 1-1 in Ukraine. Artem Kravets struck twice in the return to cancel out goals from Carlos Marchena and Asier Del Horno and send Dynamo through on away goals. Valencia's defeat ended Spanish interest in the competition as Deportivo La Coruna were soundly beaten by Danish champions AaB Aalborg (see page 41).

Dynamo's victory was just one of a number of impressive results for Ukranian sides and they now face Metalist in all-Ukrainian tie in the next round after Metalist eased past Sampdoria 3-0 on aggregate. The Kharkiv side fought a rearguard action after Denys Oliynyk's header had given them a 1-0 lead in the first leg in Italy. Goals from Serhiy Valyayev and Jaja in the home game completed a comfortable victory.

Shakhtar Donetsk were the third Ukrainian team to make it to the last 16 after goals from Yevgen Seleznyov and Jadson gave them a 2-0 opening-leg lead against a weakened Tottenham. They took advantage of Tottenham's resting of key players ahead of their League Cup Final against Manchester United in the return and Fernandinho grabbed a late equaliser to cancel out Spurs' opener from Mexican Giovani to give Shakhtar a 3-1 aggregate win.

Back in favour...Werder Bremen's on-loan Claudio Pizarro was on target in Milan

Duly punished

Aston Villa are another English side who stand accused of not taking the UEFA Cup seriously. Villa fought back commendably against CSKA Moscow in their first leg in Birmingham. John Carew's second-half shot earned a 1-1 draw after Vagner Love had scored early on for CSKA, who were coached by Brazilian Zico for the first time.

But in the Moscow return, Villa fielded a virtual reserve team that included two 19-year-old debutants, Marc Albrighton and Barry Bannan, and they were duly punished by CSKA, who scored through a Yuri Zhirkov free-kick and an injury-time strike from Wagner Love.

Russian success continued elsewhere with UEFA Cup holders Zenit St Petersburg beating Stuttgart 4-2 on aggregate, despite missing midfielder Anatoliy Timoshuk who was suspended for the second leg.

It was also a good round for French clubs as St Etienne, Marseille and Paris Saint-Germain went through, though Bordeaux lost a thriller to Galatasaray.

St Etienne put their league troubles behind them with a comprehensive victory over Olympiakos. Alain Perrin's side ended this season's unbeaten home record of the Greek champions when they won the first leg 3-1. Long-range efforts from Dimitri Payet and Ilan confirmed St Etienne's superiority in the second leg.

Marseille squeezed past Twente on penalties after a 1-1 aggregate draw. The Dutch side had looked in a promising position after winning the first leg in France thanks to a goal from Marko Arnautovic. But Marseille fought back in the return, scoring the only goal of the game through Hatem Ben Arfa and then holding their nerve in a tight penalty shoot-out.

PSG coasted past Wolfsburg after two late goals from Guillaume Hoarau had given them a comfortable first-leg lead. Two goals from Peguy Luyindula and one from Jerome Rothen wrapped up the tie for PSG in the return.

Bordeaux and Galatasaray played out a goalless first leg but the tie sprang to life in the Istanbul return. Sabri Sarioglu smashed an injury-time winner for the Turkish champions just

With Milan out of the competition, Manchester City are the new favourites to triumph in the Final in Istanbul

Classic...Sabri saves Galatasaray's against Bordeaux

as it looked like they were going to go out on away goals.

A remarkable game had opened with a goal after 12 seconds from Bordeaux's David Bellion, but Galatasaray recovered to score twice before half-time though Arda Turan and Harry Kewell. Arda added a third for Galatasaray in the second half but Bordeaux hit back with two goals in a minute from Marouane Chamakh and Fernando Cavenaghi.

Udinese are the only Italian team left in the competition after Sampdoria's exit and Fiorentina's defeat to Ajax. Udinese did it the hard way, throwing away a two-goal lead in the first leg against Lech Poznan and leaving it until injury time in the return leg before Antonio Di Natale grabbed a late winner.

Ajax collected a valuable away win in Florence thanks to a goal from Kennedy Bakircioglu. Back in Amsterdam, Fiorentina threatened to take the tie to extra-time, but Ajax substitute Leonardo popped up to

Debut...Villa's Marc Albrighton (left)

snatch an 88th-minute winner.

Braga were surprisingly comfortable winners over Belgian champions Standard Liege. The Portuguese side took a 3-0 lead to Belgium for the second leg, where they held out until late in the game, when Dieu Mbokani scored for Standard. But with just two minutes remaining Luis Aguiar restored Braga's three-goal cushion.

With Milan out of the competition, Manchester City are the new favourites to triumph in the Final in Istanbul in May. City overcame FC Copenhagen, with January signing Craig Bellamy scoring twice in the second leg for a 4-3 aggregate victory. ●

PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Gala appointment...Bulent Korkmaz

Galatasaray sacked MICHAEL SKIBBE after a 5-2 defeat at home to second-from-bottom Kocaelispor. He has been replaced as coach by BULENT KORKMAZ who won 102 caps for Turkey and spent his entire playing career with Galatasaray.

Struggling Spanish side Numancia sacked coach SERGIO KRESIC and put PACHETA in charge until the end of the season.

In Holland, ALFONS GROENENDIJK has replaced ANDRIES JONKER at Willem II. Jonker tendered his resignation saying his

Pitching in...Paul Burgess

decision was "in the interest of Willem II".

De Graafschap sacked HENK VAN STEE and appointed his assistant DARIJE KALEZIC as caretaker.

Latvia international midfielder ALEKSEJS VISNAKOVS has joined champions Ventspils after his previous deal at Skonto Riga ended.

IAN WATMORE is the new chief executive of the English football association.

PAUL BURGESS, five-times Premier League Groundsman of the Year, has moved to Real Madrid after 12 years tending to the pitch at Arsenal.

Liverpool chief executive RICK PARRY is to leave his post at the end of the season.

In Portugal, CARLOS CARVALHAL has succeeded LORI SANDRI as coach of Maritimo. Carvalhal, who won the League Cup with Vitoria last term, has been without a club since leaving Greek side Asteras Tripolis in November.

TIBOR SISA has been named the new coach of Honved in Hungary, replacing GABOR POLOSKEI. Sisa led Hungary to the European Under-19 Championship semi-finals last year.

Brazil striker FRED has returned home and joined Fluminense. The

First time...Kovac

25-year-old won three league titles at Lyon after arriving in France from Cruzeiro in 2005.

SEBASTIAN FREIS will join Koln on a free from Karlsruhe at the end of the season.

ANDREI TIKHONOV and YEGOR TITOV have left Premier League clubs Krylya Sovetov and Khimki respectively to coach Lokomotiv Astana in Kazakhstan. The two former internationals will be joined there by one-time Spartak Moscow team-mate Sergei Yuran.

IVAN SIMIC is the new president of the Slovenian FA after RUDI ZAVRL resigned.

VALDAS IVANAUSKAS, former manager of Scottish Premier League club Hearts, is the new coach of Lithuania's Under-21 side.

Experienced Croatia international defender ROBERT KOVAC has joined Dinamo Zagreb from Borussia Dortmund. It will be the first time the Berlin-born 34-year-old has played in Croatia.

Former Bologna midfielder GIACOMO BULGARELLI, who won 29 caps for Italy and played at the 1962 and 1966 World Cups, has died, aged 68.

New challenge...Yegor Titov

ASIA World Cup blow for Saudis

SAUDI ARABIA'S hopes of qualifying for the 2010 World Cup finals suffered a serious blow with a 1-0 defeat in North Korea, a result that prompted the resignation of coach Nasser Al Johar.

Al Johar, who guided the Saudis to the Final of the 2000 Asian Cup and the finals of the 2002 World Cup, stepped down after Mun In Guk's 29th-minute goal in Pyongyang condemned his side to a defeat that leaves them in fourth place in Group 2.

South Korea top the group with eight points at the halfway stage following their 1-1 draw with Iran in Tehran, as a late goal from Park Ji-sung cancelled out Javad Nekounam's free-kick for the home side.

North Korea's first-ever win over the Saudis meant they stayed in second place, one point behind their neighbours and a point ahead of the Iranians.

Al Johar, who despite standing down as national team boss will remain as technical director, has been replaced by Portuguese coach Jose Peseiro.

The 48-year-old Peseiro has previous experience working in Saudi Arabia, having coached Riyadh side Al Hilal in addition to Sporting Lisbon in his homeland. He becomes the country's 20th national team coach since 1994 and will be under pressure to deliver immediately as the Saudis attempt to climb into the top two positions to earn a guaranteed place in South Africa.

Australia, meanwhile, emerged from their game against Japan in Yokohama with a precious point from a 0-0 draw that keeps Pim Verbeek's side on top of Group 1. The Socceroos became the first visiting team to keep a clean sheet in a World Cup qualifier on Japanese soil for 20 years.

Can't catch me... North Korea's Hong Yong-jo bursts through the Saudi defence in Pyongyang

Japan dominated for most of the game but strikers Keiji Tamada and Tatsuya Tanaka were unable to find a way past the Socceroos' defence as the Australians moved closer to qualifying for a second successive finals.

"We are six points ahead and four games to go, so it is looking good for us," said Verbeek.

"We need six points more and three of our last four games are at home . We have still not qualified but made a big step [against Japan]."

Bahrain kept their hopes alive with a sensational injury-time free-kick from Mahmood Abdulrahman giving them a 1-0 win over Uzbekistan in Tashkent as they moved into third place.

Coach Nasser Al Johar stepped down after the defeat in North Korea which left Saudi Arabia lying fourth in Group 2

Milan Macala's team are four points behind second-placed Japan and are now level on points with Qatar, while the Uzbeks languish at the bottom of the table with a solitary point.

"We needed that win," said Czech coach Macala. "We still have not given up hope of second spot but at the same time I am confident that the players will maintain their battle for third place right to the end."

The two third-placed teams meet for the right to play off against an Oceania nation for a finals place. ●

Michael Church

PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Challenger...Sheikh Salman

SHEIKH Salman Bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa, president of the Bahrain FA, has caused a stir by announcing his intention to stand against Asian Football Confederation president Mohamed Bin Hammam when the Qatari's place on FIFA's executive committee comes up for election in May.

Sheikh Salman's move is the first serious threat to Hammam's standing since he assumed the AFC presidency in the summer of 2002 and signifies the growing feeling of resentment towards him within the Asian game.

Chung Mong-joon, South Korea's representative on FIFA's executive, is believed to be supporting the Sheikh's candidacy at the AFC congress and the Bahraini is also though to have the backing of delegates in east Asia – where Hammam is unpopular – and in the Middle East.

The [South] Korea FA has demanded an apology from Hammam for saying during a recent television interview that he was ready to "cut the head off" KFA president Cho Chung-yun, claiming there was a plot to deprive him of his FIFA seat.

Hammam has tried to deny Sheikh Salman his chance by attempting to make amendments to the AFC's constitution that will allow only those who have served one full term on its executive committee to run for senior posts, including the presidency.

Indeed, so rattled is Hammam that he has promised he will stand down as AFC president should he fail to win enough support to retain his position with FIFA.

Michael Church

AMERICAS Brazil talent shines through

REIGNING CHAMPIONS of the World Youth Cup and winners of five of the last seven tournaments, Argentina will not be in Egypt in September to defend their crown. In the South American Under-20 Championship, held in Venezuela, coach Sergio Batista's side managed just one win in nine games, leaving them well short of the continent's four qualifying places.

As usual they fielded lots of short youngsters and tried to play their patient passing game, but there was not enough quality to make it work. The absence of Franco Di Santo, who was not released by Chelsea, was keenly felt. If it is hard for Messi, Aguero and Tevez to operate without a target man at senior level, with this side it was asking the impossible.

Brazil struggled through the group stage but once the decisive phase began their game came together and they were comfortable winners. Striker Walter was perhaps the outstanding player on show, while Douglas Costa looks a bit like a jerky, left-footed version of the young Ronaldinho. Of more long-term importance, though, is the fact that the country is producing more versatile midfielders, well exemplified in this tournament by the all-round skills of Sandro and Giuliano.

Brazil were clear winners, finishing the final round four points clear, but in their two games against eventual runners-up Paraguay they were held the first time and beaten the other, with Paraguayan centre-back Ronald Huth superb both times. There was plenty for Paraguay to celebrate; not only have they made it to the World Youth Cup for the first time since 2003, they have also unearthed some exciting players, such as right-sided midfielder Hernan Perez and strikers Federico Santander and Robin Ramirez.

Uruguay, however, could claim to have played some of the best football. They scored the most goals while rotating their line-up to give everyone playing time. With two players already based in Europe and another since snapped up, Uruguayan club football will benefit little from the work being done at this level with its encouraging emphasis on skilful attacking. But on this evidence, the future of the senior international team looks bright.

Assured of qualification, Uruguay eased up and lost their final game to Venezuela, who thus booked their first-ever place in the World Youth Cup. The hosts have a promising keeper in Rafael Romo and can be dangerous on the counter-attack, and their victory over Uruguay meant Colombia lost out.

The Colombians, big and strong but not overly inspired, only made it to the second phase on the toss of a coin after finishing the group stage with a record identical to that of Ecuador, who were eliminated unbeaten but can take heart from the progress being made.

Also out early were Chile, who were very disappointing after coming third in the last World Youth Cup. They were in by far the stronger of the two groups, but have found a promising defender in Carlos Labrin. Bolivia were quickly dispatched, but had arrived with a very young squad.

Which leaves Peru as the team who can look back on the tournament with the least pleasure. This was Peru's great hope, the generation that did well two years ago in the Under-17 World Cup. Yet in Venezuela they lost every one of their games – a very clear indication the country is going through hard times both on and off the pitch. ●

Tim Vickery

Brazil were worthy winners...but of more long-term importance is the fact they are producing more versatile midfielders

Child's play...Brazil lift their 10th South American Under-20 championship

PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Out...Diaz

● Club America fired RAMON DIAZ after a poor start to the closing championship in Mexico. America invested heavily in pre-season – spending a reported £2.5million on Pavel Pardo from Stuttgart – in a bid to revive a team that had a dreadful 2008 and failed to qualify for the Libertadores Cup. Diaz has been replaced by JESUS RAMIREZ, who oversaw a 3-2 away win at Tigres in his first game. Tigres coach MANUEL LAPUENTE was sacked the next day.

● FC Moscow striker MAXI LOPEZ has joined Brazil's Gremio on loan for the rest of the year. The 24-year-old former River Plate, Barcelona and Mallorca player has struggled for form since he signed for the Russian Premier League club in August 2007.

● JUAN MANUEL LLOP was sacked as coach of Argentina's Racing Club, who appointed RICARDO CARUSO LOMBARDI. At Rosario Central, REINALDO MERLO took over from GUSTAVO ALFARO, who was fired after the team lost three of their first four games in the clausura.

Brazil bound...Maxi Lopez

RUSSIA PREMIER LEAGUE 2009

KEY DATES

Season starts
March 14, 2009
Season ends
November 28, 2009

HAVING WON the 2008 title with a team of newly-signed players, the defending champions **Rubin Kazan** having done relatively little in this winter's transfer market.

Anri Khagush, a 22-year-old right-back from Belarus champions BATE Borisov, left-winger Pyotr Bystrov from FC Moscow and former Real Madrid youth team defender Cesar Navas from Racing Santander are the only acquisitions of note prior at the start of a season which will be marked by Kurban Berdiyev side's Champions League debut.

Rubin's performances in their first European campaign will show the long-term potential of a team whose success last year was dismissed as no more than a good-luck story by many critics.

Second-placed **CSKA Moscow** will surely try to use the new season to re-establish their positions at the top of the Russian football ladder. They start the season with a new coach – Zico having replaced Valery Gazzaev, who led the club to 2005 UEFA Cup victory.

With more than a dozen non-Russian players in his squad, Zico will

Foreign talent...Zico

undoubtedly build his tactics around Vagner Love – the league's top scorer last term – who has been impressive in the current UEFA Cup campaign. To assist the Brazil international, CSKA will look to promising Russian youngster Alan Dzagoev and Serbia star Milos Krasic. CSKA's strong midfield has been augmented by teenage Czech prospect Tomas Necid and Brazil's Daniel Carvalho, who

CSKA will surely try to re-establish their position at the top of the football ladder

returns from a one-year loan at Internacional of Porto Alegre.

A limit of six foreign players on the pitch, reduced from seven last season, will not be a big problem for Zico as CSKA have a number of talented youngsters, including 17-year-old left-back Georgy Shennikov.

There are more promising youngsters over at **Dynamo Moscow**, where the 18-year-old Sergey Terekhov and 19-year-old Artur Yusupov have been joined by Romania's creative midfielder Adrian Ropotan, 22, who cost £2.75million from Dinamo Bucharest. Dynamo, who finished third last season, will hope that Ropotan's arrival will compensate for the loss of playmaker Igor Semshov, the Russian international who has joined Zenit.

Semshov will link up at **Zenit St Petersburg** with his former Dynamo team-mate Danny and Zenit hope the pair will form a strong partnership in central midfield, given that Andrei Arshavin has completed his move to Arsenal and Ukraine international Anatoliy Tymoshchuk is set to leave for Bayern Munich in the summer for a reported £9.6m. Zenit's midfield has also been augmented by the £2.6m signing of Hungary international Szabolcs Huszti.

Montenegrin coach Miodrag Bozovic, who surprisingly lifted low-budget Amkar Perm to fourth place last year in his first season in Russia, has accepted a lucrative offer from **FC Moscow**, where he succeeds Oleg Blokhin, who could only steer Moscow to ninth place last season.

Last year's poor showing of two more Moscow clubs, **Lokomotiv** (seventh place) and **Spartak** (eighth) has forced the clubs' owners into promising big changes. According to Loko's ambitious president, Nikolay Naumov, the Russian Railways team has only one goal – "winning all the domestic competitions". Having said goodbye to a number of old-timers such as Vladimir Maminov and Sergei Gurenko, Lokomotiv have acquired some classy new midfielders, including Croatian midfielder Tomislav Dujmovic. Russian internationals Diniyar Bilyaletdinov, Dmitri Torbinski and Dmitri Sychev, and the Russia-born Nigeria striker Peter Odemwingie remain a strong attacking quartet. Lokomotiv manager Rashid Rakhimov almost lost his job last year, but saved himself by beating champions Rubin on the last day of last season and was given another chance by owners who say they do not want to look abroad for a replacement yet.

Meanwhile, the large army of Spartak fans are pinning their hopes on ex-Denmark star Michael Laudrup, who has been at the helm of the red-and-whites since the autumn of 2008. In a bid to avoid cliques and infighting, Spartak, who are owned by oil giant Lukoil, will not have more than three foreign footballers of one nationality in the squad any longer. That's bad news for Spartak veteran Mozart, since Alex, another Brazilian, has joined the team from Internacional on a £4.4m contract until 2014. The midfielder is expected to boost Spartak's attack which looked unimpressive last year. There are two other Brazilians – strikers Welliton, who missed last season due to injury, and newly-signed Rafael Carioca. Having loaned Czech Republic midfielder Radoslav Kovac to West Ham, Spartak brought back their ex-winger Denis Boyarintsev from Shinnik.

Premier League newcomers **Kuban** are headed by new manager Sergei Ovchinnikov. This is a widely-awaited start of a coaching career for the ex-Lokomotiv, Benfica and Porto goalkeeper who was nicknamed The Boss for his commanding skills and confidence as a player.

Although they are headed by experienced manager Oleg Dolmatov, newcomers **FC Rostov** will have a hard time struggling for survival.

Tom Tomsk and **Khimki**, who managed to save themselves from relegation at the very last moment in 2008, have the same task once again. Khimki, a club from the suburbs of Moscow, are now coached by Konstantin Sarsania, a well-known international scout and former assistant of Dick Advocaat at Zenit.

Saturn, another team from the Moscow region, are likely to be fighting for a mid-table spot along with **Terek Grozny** and **Spartak Nalchik**.

Terek have been boosted by the signing of the experienced 34-year-old former Romania striker Adrian Ilie, who was persuaded by the club's vice-president Haidar Alkhanov to come out of retirement

Midfield boost...Zenit signing Huszti

Meanwhile, last year's big surprise **Amkar Perm** will try to preserve their place among the UEFA Cup qualifiers.

Krylia Sovetov, who finished equal on points with fifth-placed Zenit in 2008, will try to rise even higher under their talented young manager Leonid Slutsky, who decided to continue with the Samara club despite a number of lucrative offers, including one from CSKA Moscow. ●

Victor Gusev

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/russia

SWEDEN ALLSVENSKAN 2009

KEY DATES

Season starts	April 4, 2009
Season ends	November 1, 2009
Swedish Cup Final	September 26, 2009

AFTER THE "world's longest pre-season" (November 10 to April 3), the Allsvenskan kicks off again with 16 teams, two badly-needed new stadiums, a number of players dreaming of glory on home soil at the Under-21 European Championship in June (followed by a move abroad in July) and two clear-cut favourites.

Elfsborg hired coach Magnus Haglund back in 2004, built Boras Arena in 2005, won the league in 2006 and finished runners-up last year. And they will be hoping to go one better this time, with Brondby's Martin Ericsson joining fellow Sweden internationals Anders Svensson and Stefan Ishizaki in what should be the league's best midfield. Haglund's side boasted the stingiest defence last year (only 18 goals conceded in 30 games), but goalkeeper Johan Wiland and central defender Andreas Augustsson have both left for Denmark, joining FC Copenhagen and Horsens respectively. While buying Anders Wikstrom from Gefle might not be enough to preserve the defensive solidity, scoring should not be a problem – even if last year's on-loan forward Lasse Nilsson is now at Vitesse Arnhem.

Tricky winger...Ishizaki

In Gothenburg, IFK, Orgryte and GAIS finally have a new stadium. However, **IFK** move in without retired midfielder Niclas Alexandersson, whose calm and precise crosses will be missed. The arrival of Karl Svensson from Caen should improve an already solid defence in front of the league's best goalkeeper, Kim Christensen, but although IFK have a young, strong team they may lack the firepower to finish above main rivals Elfsborg.

Family ties...Rasmus Elm (left) has stayed with Kalmar

In theory there is a long list of teams who could challenge the two front runners, but most probably won't.

Kalmar won their first championship last year but are still a very careful operation. Their two top scorers, versatile midfielder Viktor Elm and forward Patrik Ingelsten, are both now in Holland with Heerenveen and have been replaced by two midfielders from relegated teams, Ljungskile's Daryl Smylie and Sundsvall's Tobias Eriksson, and a striker, Daniel Mendes, who did not make it at AIK. At least coach Nanne Bergstrand can still rely on the other two Elm brothers: midfielder Rasmus and forward David.

Even with Henrik Larsson in their ranks, **Helsingborgs** might struggle for consistency. The club's lack of funds showed when Brazilian striker Alvaro Santos – a former Reds favourite who the fans still call "God" – returned to Sweden after a spell in France but opted to join newly promoted **Orgryte**, where he will be reunited with Marcus Allback. The pair played together at FC Copenhagen and should be good enough to keep Orgryte up.

Malmo have moved into the new Swedbank Stadium, but coach Roland Nilsson has still not yet built a team able to win the title. Striker Ola Toivonen has moved to PSV Eindhoven, but Malmo's biggest problem might be a shaky defence. New Brazilian left-back Ricardo and speedy forward Daniel Larsson from Hacken could be exciting additions, though.

In Stockholm, nobody knows what to expect from the big three after a disappointing 2008. At **AIK**, new coach Mikael Stahre can't count on any major signings, but if he can keep Argentinian striker Ivan Obolo and avoid the injury list of last year they could be a surprise. At **Djurgardens**, the new coaching duo of Zoran Lukic and Andree Jeglertz have their work cut out, especially after defender Lance Davis returned to South Africa and forward Jones Kusi-Asare left for Esbjerg of Denmark. Tony Gustavsson continues at **Hammarby**, but he could be in trouble with a team that seems to be lacking both defensively and offensively. Midfielder Erkan Zengin has joined Besiktas on loan, while Igor Armas has signed from Moldovan side Zimbru and Monday James joins on loan from Bayelsa United of Nigeria.

Although IFK have a young, strong team they may lack the firepower to finish above main rivals Elfsborg

AIK hit man...Obolo

Back in 2005, Janne Andersson of **Halmstads** was rated as one of the most promising coaches in the game by *World Soccer*. Andersson is still at Orjans Vall and still developing talented young players, such as midfielder Anel Raskaj, and if he takes another step forward the team might exceed expectations this term.

Trelleborgs and **Orebro** did so last year by staying out of relegation trouble. Trelleborgs have managed to keep defender Rasmus Bengtsson, but a good showing at the Under-21s in June could see him move on. Orebro went on a nine-game unbeaten run last autumn after forward Kim Olsen joined from Danish club Silkeborg on loan. He is now a permanent fixture at Behrn Arena, while veteran Sebastian Henriksson has left.

GAIS and **Gefle** face difficult seasons. GAIS lost key players Bobbie Friberg da Cruz to Randers of Denmark and Armenia midfielder Levon Pachajyan to Fredrikstad of Norway, while coach Magnus Pehrsson left for Aalborg. Former Orebro assistant Alexander Axan – who has the crest of his favourite team, AIK, tattooed on his arm – takes over. Gefle struggled last year and will find it even harder this term following the retirement of three of last year's squad.

Newcomers **Hacken** and **Brommapojkarna** don't look like they will be able to cut it in the top tier, where two teams are relegated and the club in 14th place goes into the play-offs. Striker Olof Guterstam, who is studying to become a doctor, has returned to BP from Hammarby but he can't be expected to keep the team alive all by himself. ●

Per Johansson

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/sweden

IRELAND FAI PREMIER DIVISION 2009

KEY DATES

Season starts
March 6, 2009
Season ends
November 6, 2009
FAI Cup Final
November 22, 2009

DESPITE THEIR players reluctantly taking a significant wage cut during the close season, **Bohemians** start as favourites to retain their league title.

A proposed lucrative deal to sell Dalymount Park to a developer and move to a new stadium near Dublin Airport may now be on hold, but manager Pat Fenlon has still managed to keep the majority of last season's double-winning squad.

Expect **Derry City** and **St Patrick's Athletic** to be the clubs putting the most pressure on Bohs in the race for the title. St Pat's have got off to a great start in each of the past two seasons before losing their lead and finishing second, to Drogheda and Bohemians respectively.

During the close season Pat's sold midfielder Keith Fahey to Birmingham City and several other players left as the club abandoned their full-time policy. But new manager Jeff Kenna, who won a Premiership medal with Blackburn Rovers, has brought in a few players from his former club Galway United and has ex-Canada international Paul Peschisolido as assistant manager at Inchicore.

Stephen Kenny returned to Derry City last season after a spell in Scotland with Dumfermline and managed to steady the ship at the Brandywell. Kenny is one of the best young managers in Ireland and, while he has a great cup record with Derry, this time around he should have plenty of time to concentrate on the championship.

Cork boss...Doolin

Paul Doolin, who spent heavily when winning the League with Drogheda in 2007, is now in charge of **Cork City**. Unlike Dublin, where there are too many clubs, Cork don't have any opposition locally and are always well supported.

Bohemians manager Pat Fenlon has managed to keep the majority of last season's double-winning squad

After more than 20 nomadic years **Shamrock Rovers** have finally settled down in their new stadium in Tallaght. But while new manager Michael O'Neill is naturally ambitious, the Hoops don't seem to have the talent at present to challenge for the title. Likewise **Dundalk**, who won promotion last season.

Paul Cook did a great job at **Sligo Rovers** last season, getting them into Europe and the All-Ireland Setanta Cup competition, and he is back in charge despite quitting during the close season.

Only one club will be automatically relegated this season. The sides finishing eight and ninth will meet to determine who has to play a relegation/promotion game against either the second division's runner-up or third-place team.

Galway United, who just survived relegation last season, will probably be favourites for the drop this term. Other contenders could be **Bray Wanderers** and **Drogheda United**. Drogs have lost all their players from last season and new manager Alan Mathews must build a new team at a club where money is really tight.

Shelbourne, who are now just about getting back on track after their financial meltdown of two years ago, will probably start favourites to win the second tier. ●

Sean Creedon

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/ireland

ESTONIA MEISTRILIIGA 2009

KEY DATES

Season starts
March 7, 2009
Season ends
November 7, 2009

EVEN THOUGH the 2005 champions TVMK Tallinn went bust last year, the new season promises to be an exciting one, with the capital's "big two" having lost several key players while many of their rivals have strengthened.

Levadia Tallinn, champions in four of the last five seasons, have lost three important players, with forward Tarmo Kink and defender Tihhon Sisov joining Hungarian side Gyori ETO, while defender Marek Lemsalu has retired.

Flora Tallinn have also lost three key players as the league's best player, striker Juha Hakola, has moved to Heracles Almelo in Holland, fellow forward Jarmo Ahjupera has joined Kink and Sisov at Gyori, and midfielder Martin Reim (capped a European record 156 times by Estonia) has retired.

Flora have also made an important change in their management, with national team boss Tarmo Ruutli replacing coach Pasi Rautiainen.

"I have the necessary energy to do both jobs. Last term I was a Levadia supporter, now the situation is different. It is time to knock them off their throne," says Ruutli, a former Levadia coach who is now in his second stint in charge at Flora. Defender Teet Allas will be his assistant.

Elsewhere Sergei Ratnikov, who worked with TVMK last season, has moved with his sons Eduard and Daniil to take over as coach at **Narva Trans**. Ratnikov also bought in midfielder Timo Teniste and forward Kristjan Tiirik, two players he worked with at Tammeka Tartu two seasons ago.

"There are many players in Europe without a contract so the clubs have more opportunities"

Last year's fifth-placed side **Sillamae Kalev** have ambitious plans for the new season and have signed virtually a whole new team, mostly made up of Russians and Lithuanians. However, the large number of foreign arrivals could cause problems as the rules only allow three players without an EU passport per team.

One of the more interesting sides are **Nomme Kalju**. In their debut season in the top flight they finished in fifth – rising to fourth after TVMK's elimination – but owner Kuno Tehva and Brazilian coach Fredo Getulio have declared that the main goal in the near future is the title.

Kalju signed two players from TVMK – goalkeeper Daniil Savitski and Estonia winger Sergei Terekhov – and are looking for more players from abroad. "We have some offers from Russia, Latvia and Lithuania," claims Tehva. "There are many players in Europe without a contract and so the clubs have more opportunities."

In a league where the bottom club are relegated and the club finishing ninth go into a promotion/relegation play-off, survival looks to be the name of the game for **Viljandi Tulevik**, **Tammeka Tartu** and **Tallinna Kalev**, along with newcomers **FC Kuressaare** and **Flora Paide**. ●

Gone Dutch...Hakola

Andres Must

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/estonia

USA MAJOR LEAGUE SOCCER 2009

KEY DATES

Season starts
March 19, 2009
Play-offs start
October 29, 2009
MLS Cup Final
November 22, 2009, Seattle

EASTERN CONFERENCE

As the winners of last year's MLS Cup, **Columbus Crew** would no doubt see no real reason for any radical changes, but the departure of coach Sigi Schmid to newcomers Seattle has meant a change at the top, with former Crew and Poland international Robert Warzycha, who had been Schmid's assistant, taking over. Last year's key player, the 36-year-old former Argentina striker Guillermo Barros Schelotto, returns.

Beaten in the play-off semi-finals by Columbus last year, **Chicago Fire** also have little need for change. Coach Denis Hamlett stays and Cuauhtemoc Blanco, the mesmerizing Mexican, returns – as does ex-Fulham striker Brian McBride. However, powerful defender Wilman Conde is still looking for a move.

DC United have ditched Argentinian Marcelo Gallardo and defenders Gonzalo Peralta and Gonzalo Martinez, but coach Tom Soehn has survived last season's failures. Christian Gomez, traded last year to Colorado to make way for Gallardo, has returned, but at 34 – and playing alongside Luciano Emilio (30) and Jaime Moreno (35) Gomez – he gives the attack a rather old look.

Claudio Lopez, last year's major signing, stays at **Kansas City Wizards**, despite losing his Designated Player status, and is joined by fellow Argentinian Santiago Hirsig (31) from San Lorenzo. More will be expected of injury-prone forward Josh Wolff, while Roger Espinoza, the 22-year-old Honduras international, looks encouraging.

New England Revolution failed to make it four MLS Cup Finals in a row when they were heavily beaten in the play-off quarter-finals by Chicago Fire last year. Coach Steve Nicol has made no dramatic signings, but has bid farewell to steady USA central defender Michael Parkhurst, who is now with Nordsjaelland in Denmark.

New York Red Bulls reached the MLS Cup Final last season, their best-ever performance. Ex-Aston Villa striker Juan Pablo Angel returns but Dutch midfielder Dave Van den Bergh has gone to Dallas. Speedy acquisitions Ghanaian Dominic Oduro, Bermudan Khano Smith, Cameroonian Matthew Mbuta and Macoumba Kandji from Senegal suggest a rapid counter-attacking style this season.

Toronto FC were desperately poor during their first year, 2007, and only marginally better last season. But the tremendous enthusiasm of the fans remains undamaged and the calibre of their players has improved. A major plus for this season is the signing of forward Dwayne De Rosario, a Toronto native, formerly with Houston.

Former Villan...Angel

WESTERN CONFERENCE

With the departure of Francisco Mendoza to Guadalajara, **Chivas USA** – who are supposed to be a mostly Mexican side – now include only one Mexican in their squad: defender Claudio Suarez, who is 40. Rising US star Sacha Kljestan returns after training with Scottish Premier League side Celtic during the winter, but Switzerland midfielder Raphael Wicky, who sat out most of his debut season last year with injuries, has retired.

Colorado Rapids failed to make the play-offs last season after Englishman Gary Smith took over in mid-campaign. Smith has been retained and he has hired another Brit, Steve Guppy, to act as his assistant. His most skilful player, Christian Gomez, has been traded to DC United but captain Pablo Mastroeni, who was thought to be heading to Europe, has decided to stay.

FC Dallas have lost Mexican defender Duilio Davino, who had not been a great success, but they have gained midfielder Dave Van den Bergh from New York. Colombian midfielder David Ferreir (31) joins this season from partner club Atletico Paranaense, while Kenny Cooper, scorer of 18 goals last year and subject of much talk about a move to Europe, is staying. Pablo Ricchetti, an Argentinian midfielder, is the new club captain.

On Fire...Blanco demonstrates his trademark trick for Chicago against Columbus

At **Houston Dynamo**, coach Dominic Kinnear has a full complement of scrappy midfielders but the departure of De Rosario means his side have lost one of the league's most dangerous attacking players. Also gone is forward Nate Jaqua, who was taken by Seattle in the expansion draft. However, national team striker Brian Ching remains. Dynamo have so far refused to bring in a major star, but they have a Designated Player slot open if they change their mind.

Seattle have sold more than 20,000 season tickets, such is the enthusiasm

Even without David Beckham, who does not return from Milan until July, **Los Angeles Galaxy** will be a better team this year. No big names have arrived, but trades within MLS have given the team a meaner, leaner look. Combative veteran Dema Kovalenko, a favourite of coach Bruce Arena, will no doubt ensure a goodly dose of physical contact – and a steady flow of yellow cards. Midfielder Mike Magee has been acquired from New York Red Bulls. If there is to be any sign of the beautiful game for Galaxy, it will have to come from Landon Donovan.

Staying put...Cooper

Real Salt Lake made the play-offs for the first time last season with the opening of the new Rio Tinto Stadium buoying the club's spirits. Argentinian Fabian Espindola has departed but all the key players from last year have been retained, including Argentinian midfielder Javier Morales, Colombian defender Jamison Olave, midfielder Kyle Beckerman and Armenian-born forward Yura Movsisyan.

Last season **San Jose Earthquakes** were an expansion team, being built up from scratch by coach Frank Yallop. They ended up sharing the worst record in the league with LA Galaxy – with just eight wins in 30 games. The one bright spot was the form of English import Darren Huckerby, who will now have a new attacking partner in Bobby Convey, who returns to MLS from Reading. Up front, Yallop admits to liking a target man and has acquired Cam Weaver, back in the USA after two years in Norway.

Seattle Sounders have sold more than 20,000 season tickets for their debut MLS campaign before any fans have seen a single game, such is the enthusiasm up in the American north west. New coach Sigi Schmid, fresh from last season's MLS Cup triumph with Columbus, has made the league's only real big-name signing for this season, bringing in Freddie Ljungberg. Veteran US international goalkeeper Kasey Keller has also signed. ●

Paul Gardner

ASIAN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2009

KEY DATES

Group stage starts
March 10, 2009
Knockout stage starts
May 27, 2009
Final
November 6, 2009

GROUP A

Ambitious **Al Hilal** (Saudi Arabia) have signalled their intent to finally make an impression on the Champions League with the signing of South Korea striker Seol Ki-hyeon on loan from English side Fulham as they look to rid themselves of an "underachievers" tag.

Despite their status as the most successful club in Asian continental competition before the establishment of the Champions League in 2002, Al Hilal have yet to win the tournament in its current format and have only once progressed to the knockout phase.

However, they face a tough challenge in a group that features **Pakhtakor** (Uzbekistan), who lost their league title to Bunyodkor last year, together with Ivan Hasek's **Al Ahli** (UAE) and **Saba Battery** (Iran).

GROUP B

With veteran midfielder Karim Bagheri enjoying an Indian summer at **Persepolis** (Iran), and Ali Karimi having returned to the club, the Tehran giants will be among of the favourites to win the title after securing their domestic championship last season.

Portuguese coach Nelo Vingada has taken over following the departure of Afshin Ghotbi and should be capable of steering his side past the challenge of perennial underachievers **Al Gharafa** (Qatar) and **Al Shabab** (Saudi Arabia). **Al Sharjah** (UAE), meanwhile, ensured their place after beating India's Dempo in a play-off.

Star in Qatar...Fabio Cesar

Major player...Seol Ki-hyeon (right) could help Al Hilal's trophy push

GROUP C

After being expelled from the competition in 2007 for failing to submit their squad list on time, twice Asian champions **Esteghlal** (Iran) return to the continental stage. They have been drawn alongside another double Champions League-winning club in **Al Ittihad** (Saudi Arabia), and these two will be strong favourites to reach the last 16.

Umm Salal (Qatar), who feature Bahrain striker A'ala Hubail and Qatar's naturalised Brazilian Fabio Cesar, could spring a surprise while **Al Jazira** (UAE) – under the control Abel Braga, the Brazilian who coached Internacional to 2006 Club World Cup triumph – should not be dismissed.

GROUP D

Despite missing out on the Champions League crown last season, **Bunyodkor** (Uzbekistan) have managed to hold on to Brazil World Cup winner Rivaldo as they aim to build on last season's impressive run.

They go into the tournament having won their league for the first time but will be without coach Zico, who has joined CSKA Moscow. Former finalists **Sepahan** (Iran), who lost the 2007 Final to Urawa Reds, represent the greatest threat to Bunyodkor in a group that also includes **Al Shabab** (UAE) and **Al Ettifaq** (Saudi Arabia).

GROUP E

Dragan Stojkovic will take **Nagoya Grampus** (Japan) into the Champions League for the first time after an impressive first season in charge of the J.League club.

Ulsan Hyundai (South Korea) have plenty of experience at this level, having reached the semi-finals in 2006, while **Beijing Guoan** (China) are also old hands. **Newcastle Jets** (Australia), making their debut in the competition, will be looking to emulate the achievements of compatriots Adelaide United, who reached last year's final.

With veteran midfielder Karim Bagheri enjoying an Indian summer, Persepolis of Iran will be one of the favourites

GROUP F

Gamba Osaka (Japan) may be the holders but Akira Nishino's side almost missed out on the opportunity to defend their title. After a disappointing league campaign, only victory over Kashiwa Reysol in the Emperor's Cup Final earned them the right to compete for the continental crown again.

With **Sriwijaya** (Indonesia) likely to be the whipping boys of the group, Gamba will battle it out with Chinese Super League champions **Shandong Luneng** (China), who are former quarter-finalists, and **FC Seoul** (South Korea) for the two places in the knockout phase.

GROUP G

K-League winners and twice Asian champions **Suwon Bluewings** (South Korea) have bolstered their squad with the signing of China defender Li Weifeng as Cha Bum-Kun aims to take the club back to the top of the continental game.

Suwon's task of qualifying from the group stage will be tough, however, as they take on J.League champions **Kashima Antlers** (Japan) – who reached the quarter-finals last season – and Chinese Super League runners-up **Shanghai Shenhua** (China).

Singapore Armed Forces (Singapore) qualified via a play-off but they will need to improve quickly if they are not to be overawed by the other teams in the group.

Bunyodkor big gun...Rivaldo

GROUP H

This group also features a two-time Asian champion, with **Pohang Steelers** (South Korea) attempting to reclaim former glories.

Pohang won the old Asian Club Championship in 1997 and 1998, and have featured in the Champions League in its current guise on several occasions without making a major impact on the tournament in recent times.

Central Coast Mariners (Australia) make their debut, as do **Tianjin Teda** (China), while **Kawasaki Frontale** (Japan) will be aiming to learn from the experience of reaching the quarter-finals in 2007. ●

Michael Church

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/asianchampionsleague

JAPAN J.LEAGUE 2009

KEY DATES

Season starts	March 7, 2009
Mid-season break	May 25, 2009 to June 19, 2009
Season ends	December 5, 2009
J.League Cup Final	November 3, 2009

THIS SEASON'S competition promises another fascinating race between 18 closely matched teams that tend to differ widely in terms of style. And if there is one thing the J.League continues to prove, it is that there is no single "Japanese way" of playing.

Expect more of the same from champions **Kashima Antlers** this season. Oswaldo De Oliveira has inherited the solid 4-4-2 approach of his Brazilian predecessors: building from the wings, extremely firm at the back and reserving a big role for the brilliance of Marquinhos in attack.

Oliveira has assembled a strong squad that includes rapidly improving youngsters such as Atsuto Uchida and Shinzo Koroki. With Mitsuo Ogasawara back from injury and Takeshi Aoki again knocking on the door of the national team, Antlers are clearly good enough to win a record third consecutive title.

Perhaps Asian Champions League success has made **Gamba Osaka** take their football more seriously again. Great going forward, Gamba had the league's fourth-worst defensive record last season and are trying to remedy that this campaign by bringing in young Japan defender Kazumichi Takagi from S-Pulse and tall South Korea centre-back Park Dong-hyuk.

With South Korea's Cho Jae-jin and Brazilian Leandro also arriving to reinforce the Gamba attack, and the midfield centred on Yasuhito Endo, this looks like a powerful recipe for success in the J.League as well as Asia.

Asian Champions in 2007, **Urawa Reds** remain Japan's biggest earning, best-supported club, but last year's seventh place was their lowest league finish since 2002. New manager Volker Finke has the difficult task of trying to reorganise a team of big-name players in a state of shock. Last year's injury problems have at least receded, and Alex and Robson Ponte should both be ready to start the season.

Reds' Brazil-born midfielder Tulio has had a knee operation and, along with Tatsuya Tanaka, he is back in Japan's national team. There are no big new signings but Reds might just have enough to become the team they weren't last season.

With Takashi Sekizuka returning to the helm after health problems, the time has surely come for last year's runners-up **Kawasaki Frontale** to win something. They can strike from anywhere – with three good foreign forwards; two trigger-happy Japan midfielders, Kengo Nakamura and

Surgery...Tulio

Hiroyuki Taniguchi; and wingers Satoru Yamagishi and Yusuke Mori – while the rearguard features two important back-up members of the national squad in defender Shuhei Terada and keeper Eiji Kawashima.

Dragan Stojkovic returned to **Nagoya Grampus** as manager last year and they recorded their highest finish since 1996, taking third spot. Frode Johnsen has since gone but Davi from Consadole Sapporo is a big signing up front to play alongside Japan striker Keiji Tamada, and the arrival of Hayuma Tanaka from Marinos provides options on the wing.

Grampus midfielder Yoshizumi Ogawa, the league's best new player last term, was a revelation in his first full year at the club and he will be one to watch out for again in this campaign.

The two extremes of Japanese football are exemplified by two young managers born just four days apart, in September, 1965. Kenta Hasegawa's shoot-on-sight approach took **Shimizu S-Pulse** to the League Cup Final last year, and his attack will be even brighter now that Johnsen from Grampus and Yuichiro Nagai from Reds have joined national team striker Shinji Okazaki. The big concern is defender Takagi may be missed at the back.

Four days Hasegawa's junior,

Top scorer...Marquinhos scored 21 league goals last season

Pericles Chamusca at **Oita Trinita** has devised a far more patient, pragmatic defensive style of football (and one that earned Trinita victory over S-Pulse) in the League Cup and fourth place in the league – their highest-ever finish.

Chamusca is standing by most of the squad he had last season, including veteran striker Ueslei, but he has made a sharp buy in young forward Yasuhito Morishima from Cerezo Osaka.

Vissel Kobe drew far too many matches to challenge for the title last year but some powerful new signings could put them among the leaders this time. Caio Junior takes over as manager and Japan's two-time World Cup skipper Tsuneyasu Miyamoto arrives from Red Bull Salzburg as captain. Kazuki Ganaha from Frontale and Marcel on loan from Benfica join the attack, and the central midfield pairing of Kim Nam-il and Alan Bahia will be as good as any. Even the loss of Japan striker Yoshito Okubo to Wolfsburg of Germany may not matter too much.

FC Tokyo should be the best of the rest. The capital's top club stayed in contact with the leaders from start to finish last season and achieved their highest league finish since 2003 in sixth. Look out also for **Omiya Ardija**, where South Korea's Park Won-jae and Croatia's Mato Neretljak have strengthened the defence.

Yokohama F.Marinos, **Kashiwa Reysol** and **Albirex Niigata** have made few changes and all three may find it hard to break out from the lower half of the table. **JEF Chiba** could climb a few places on the strength of last season's form after Scottish coach Alex Miller took over, while **Kyoto Sanga** have consolidated with some good foreign signings.

Jubilo Iwata, on the other hand, have made no big changes after narrowly missing relegation last season. After winning the second division championship, **Sanfrecce Hiroshima** have decided to carry on with the same team. The downside is that it still looks very like the team that was relegated in 2007. **Montedio Yamagata**, promoted in second place, have something of a journeyman squad with everything still to prove. ●

Mike Plastow

Expect more of the same from Kashima Antlers...who are clearly good enough to win a record third consecutive title

On the up...Stojkovic

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/japan

Number one...Janko

31 league goals scored by Salzburg's Marc Janko

AUSTRIA

Suspended Janko still ahead of the pack

Salzburg striker Marc Janko continues to lead the race for the ESM Golden Shoe as the top goalscorer in European league football despite being suspended for his side's 3-0 victory at LASK.

Meanwhile, Leo Windtner is the new president of the Austrian football association.

BELGIUM

Tight at the top

A week after moving four points clear at the top of the table with a 4-2 victory over reigning champions Standard, Anderlecht let their lead slip back to two points with a 1-1 draw at Mouscron.

Standard returned to winning ways with a 4-0 victory at home to Cercle Brugge as Dieumerci Mbokani scored twice.

In the Cup semi-finals, Genk face Lierse, while Cercle Brugge meet Mechelen.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Zrinjski set their sights on the double

Having opened up a nine-point lead in the league, Zrinjski also have one eye on retaining the domestic cup.

The holders face second-place Slavija in the semi-finals on March 25 and April 15 to decide who will meet the winner of Siroki Brijeg v Sloboda in the Final.

RESULTS

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st knockout round, 1st legs

Feb 24
Arsenal (Eng) 1 (Van Persie pen 37)
Roma (Ita) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 60,003. **Ref:** Larsen (Den)
Arsenal: Almunia - Sagna, Gallas, Toure, Clichy, Eboue (Ramsey 82), Denilson, Diaby (Song 62), Nasri, Bendtner (Vela 67), Van Persie.
Roma: Doni - Motta, Loria (Diamoutene 71), Mexes, Riise, De Rossi, Taddei, Brighi (Pizarro 57), Perrotta, Totti, Julio Baptista (Vucinic 82).

Feb 24
Atletico Madrid (Spa) 2 (Rodriguez 3, Forlan 45)
Porto (Por) 2 (Lopez 22, 72)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 47,000. **Ref:** Webb (Eng)
Atletico: Franco - Seitaridis, Pablo, Ujfalusi, Antonio Lopez, Rodriguez (Miguel 80), Paulo Assuncao, Raul Garcia (Maniche 67), Simao, Aguero (Sinama-Pongolle 56), Forlan.
Porto: Helton - Sapunaru (Pedro Emanuel 79), Rolando, Bruno Alves, Cissokho, L Gonzalez, Fernando, Raul Meireles (Tomas Costa 90), Lopez (Sektioui 89), Hulk, Rodriguez.

Feb 24
Internazionale (Ita) 0
Manchester United (Eng) 0
Att: 80,018. **Ref:** Medina Cantalejo (Spa)
Inter: Julio Cesar - Maicon, Rivas (Cordoba 46), Chivu, Santon, Zanetti, Cambiasso, Muntari (Cruz 76), Stankovic, Adriano (Balotelli 76), Ibrahimovic.
Man Utd: Van der Sar - O'Shea, Ferdinand, Evans, Evra, Fletcher, Carrick, Cristiano Ronaldo, Giggs, Park (Rooney 84), Berbatov.

Feb 24
Lyon (Fra) 1 (Juninho 7)
Barcelona (Spa) 1 (Henry 67)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 39,258. **Ref:** Stark (Ger)
Lyon: Lloris - Mensah, Boumsong, Cris, Grosso, Toulalan, Juninho (Kallstrom 79), Makoun, Keita (Pjanic 88), Benzema, Ederson (Delgado 65).
Barcelona: Valdes - Daniel Alves, Pique, Marquez, Puyol, Xavi, Toure, Busquets (Keita 77), Messi, Eto'o, Henry.

Feb 25
Chelsea (Eng) 1 (Drogba 12)
Juventus (Ita) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 38,079. **Ref:** Benquerenca (Por)
Chelsea: Cech - Bosingwa, Alex, Terry, A Cole, Mikel, Ballack (Mancienne 81), Lampard, Kalou (Malouda 72), Anelka, Drogba.
Juventus: Buffon - Mellberg, Chiellini, Legrottaglie, Molinaro, Camoranesi (Marchionni 52), Sissoko (Trezeguet 86), Tiago (Marchisio 62), Nedved, Del Piero, Amauri.

Feb 25
Real Madrid (Spa) 0
Liverpool (Eng) 1 (Benayoun 83)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 80,000. **Ref:** Rosetti (Ita)
Real Madrid: Casillas - Sergio Ramos, Cannavaro, Pepe, Heinze, Robben, L Diarra, Gago, Marcelo (Guti 46), Higuain, Raul.
Liverpool: Reina - Arbeloa, Skrtel, Carragher, Fabio Aurelio, Xabi Alonso, Mascherano, Benayoun, Riera (Gerrard 88), Kuijt (Lucas 90), Fernando Torres (Babel 62).

Feb 25
Sporting Lisbon (Por) 0
Bayern Munich (Ger) 5 (Ribery 42, pen 63, Klose 57, Toni 84, 90)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 35,163. **Ref:** Layec (Fra)
Sporting: Tiago - Abel (Bruno Pereirinha 61), Tonel, Anderson Polga, Caneira, Rochemback, Joao Moutinho, Izmailov (Vuckevic 61), Romagnoli, Derlei (Yannick 71), Liedson.
Bayern: Rensing - Oddo (Lell 67), Lucio (Van Buyten 78), Demichelis, Lahm, Van Bommel, Ze Roberto, Schweinsteiger (Altintop 71), Ribery, Klose, Toni.

Feb 25
Villarreal (Spa) 1 (Rossi pen 67)
Panathinaikos (Gre) 1 (Karagounis 59)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Plautz (Aut)
Villarreal: Diego Lopez - Angel, Fuentes, Godin, Bruno Soriano, Senna, Eguren (Pires 62), Cazorla, Rossi, Ibagaza (Cani 70), Llorente (Nihat 62).
Panathinaikos: Galinovic - Goumas (Gabriel 46), Vyntra, Sarriegi, Nilsson, Gilberto Silva, Simao, Wawrzyniak, Karagounis (Salpigidis 85), Spyropoulos, Mantzios (Rukavina 90).

2nd legs - March 10/11

UEFA CUP

1st knockout round

1st legs - February 18/19; 2nd legs - February 26
AaB Aalborg (Den) v Deportivo La Coruna (Spa)
3-0, 3-1 (agg 6-1)
Aston Villa (Eng) v CSKA Moscow (Rus)
1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3)
Bordeaux (Fra) v Galatasaray (Tur)
0-0, 3-4 (agg 3-4)
FC Copenhagen (Den) v Manchester City (Eng)
2-2, 1-2 (agg 3-4)
Dynamo Kyiv (Ukr) v Valencia (Spa)
1-1, 2-2 (agg 3-3; Dynamo on away goals)
Fiorentina (Ita) v Ajax (Hol)
0-1, 1-1 (agg 1-2)
Lech Poznan (Pol) v Udinese (Ita)
2-2, 1-2 (agg 3-4)
Marseille (Fra) v Twente Enschede (Hol)
0-1, 1-0 (aet) (agg 1-1; Marseille 7-6 on pens)
NEC Nijmegen (Hol) v Hamburg (Ger)
0-3, 0-1 (agg 0-4)
Olympiakos (Gre) v Saint-Etienne (Fra)
1-3, 1-2 (agg 2-5)
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) v Wolfsburg (Ger)
2-0, 3-1 (agg 5-1)
Sampdoria (Ita) v Metalist (Ukr)
0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3)
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) v Tottenham (Eng)
2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1)
Sporting Braga (Por) v Standard Liege (Blg)
3-0, 1-1 (agg 4-1)
Werder Bremen (Ger) v Milan (Ita)
1-1, 2-2 (agg 3-3; Werder on away goals)
Zenit St Petersburg (Rus) v Stuttgart (Ger)
2-1, 2-1 (agg 4-2)

2nd knockout round draw

CSKA Moscow v Shakhtar Donetsk
Dynamo Kyiv v Metalist
Hamburg v Galatasaray
Manchester City v AaB Aalborg
Marseille v Ajax
Paris Saint-Germain v Sporting Braga
Udinese v Zenit St Petersburg
Werder Bremen v Saint-Etienne

1st legs - March 12; 2nd legs - March 18/19

ALBANIA

ALBANIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FK Tirana	22	11	8	3	34	17	41
Vllaznia	22	12	5	5	31	20	41
Dinamo	22	10	8	4	32	19	38
Shkumbini	22	10	6	6	24	20	36
Besa	22	9	5	8	22	24	32
Teuta	22	7	8	7	19	16	29
Elbasani	22	5	10	7	16	18	25
Flamurtari	22	6	7	9	16	20	25
Partizani	22	6	7	9	16	21	25
Apolonia	22	7	3	12	23	31	24
Bylis	22	5	6	11	18	33	21
Lushnja	22	4	7	11	14	26	19

AUSTRIA

Feb 20: Mattersburg 2 Ried 2.
Feb 21: Kapfenberg 2 Austria Karnten 1.
Feb 22: Salzburg 2 Rapid 1.
Feb 27: Altach 2 Austria Wien 1.
Feb 28: Rapid 1 Ried 0; Sturm 1 Kapfenberg 3; Austria Karnten 0 Mattersburg 0.
Mar 1: LASK 0 Salzburg 3.

AUSTRIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Salzburg	23	16	4	3	62	30	52
Rapid	24	13	6	5	57	28	45
Sturm	22	13	3	6	50	27	42
Austria Wien	23	12	6	5	36	28	42
A Karnten	22	9	6	7	33	24	33
Ried	24	9	6	9	32	29	33
LASK	23	8	1	14	22	44	25
Kapfenberg	24	7	3	14	31	51	24
Altach	23	5	1	17	31	67	16
Mattersburg	24	3	6	15	25	51	15

BELGIUM

Feb 6: Kortrijk 0 Standard 2.
Feb 7: Tubize 1 Mechelen 5; Dender 0 Club Brugge 2; Roeselare 2 Germinal Beerschot 2; Genk 1 Zulte Waregem 2; Anderlecht 3 Mons 2; Gent 2 Mouscron 0.
Feb 8: Westerlo 1 Lokeren 0; Cercle Brugge 2 Charleroi 2.
Feb 14: Germinal Beerschot 1 Cercle Brugge 1; Standard 4 Tubize 0; Lokeren 2 Roeselare 1; Mechelen 3 Gent 3; Mons 1 Kortrijk 1; Mouscron 0 Westerlo 0; Zulte Waregem 1 Dender 0.
Feb 15: Charleroi 0 Anderlecht 1; Club Brugge 0 Genk 2.
Feb 18: Gent 1 Anderlecht 2.
Feb 20: Genk 1 Mouscron 1.
Feb 21: Kortrijk 1 Charleroi 1; Tubize 0 Zulte Waregem 6; Cercle Brugge 0 Lokeren 0; Gent 1 Germinal Beerschot 3; Roeselare 3 Mons 2; Dender 1 Mechelen 2.
Feb 22: Westerlo 1 Club Brugge 1; Anderlecht 4 Standard 2.
Feb 27: Mechelen 2 Genk 1.
Feb 28: Club Brugge 2 Roeselare 1; Zulte Waregem 1 Westerlo 1; Dender 4 Tubize 0; Germinal Beerschot 3 Kortrijk 0; Charleroi 3 Mons 0; Mouscron 1 Anderlecht 1.
Mar 1: Lokeren 0 Gent 1; Standard 4 Cercle Brugge 0.

BELGIUM	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anderlecht	24	17	3	4	58	26	54
Standard	24	16	4	4	49	23	52
Club Brugge	24	13	5	6	41	31	44
Genk	24	12	4	8	36	32	40
Z Waregem	24	11	5	8	40	29	38
Westerlo	24	10	7	7	28	26	37
Gent	24	10	6	8	48	35	36
Cercle Brugge	24	10	5	9	35	38	35
Lokeren	24	8	10	6	28	22	34
Germinal B	24	8	8	8	34	29	32
Mouscron	24	8	8	8	33	31	32
Mechelen	24	7	9	8	34	40	30
Kortrijk	24	7	9	8	24	35	30
Charleroi	24	7	5	12	32	40	26
Dender	24	5	6	13	30	42	21
Tubize	24	5	3	16	25	60	18
Roeselare	24	4	5	15	24	47	17
Mons	24	3	8	13	26	39	17

BELGIAN CUP – quarter-finals

1st legs - January 27/28; 2nd legs - February 4/17
Cercle Brugge v Roeselare
1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2; Cercle Brugge on away goals)
Gent v Genk
1-0, 0-2 (aet) (agg 1-2)
Mechelen v Kortrijk
1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
Racing Mechelen v Lierse
1-0, 0-3 (agg 1-3)

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Feb 28: Borac 1 Zrinjski 2; Leotar 1 Orasje 0; Sarajevo 1 Celik 0; Sloboda 1 Zeljeznicar 0; Travnik 3 Posusje 2; Velez 1 Laktasi 0; Zvijezda 3 Modrica 2; Siroki Brijeg 2 Slavija 0.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zrinjski	16	12	2	2	35	21	38
Slavija	16	8	5	3	21	15	29
Sloboda	16	8	3	5	20	11	27
Laktasi	16	8	3	5	26	19	27
Sarajevo	16	7	5	4	21	17	26
Siroki Brijeg	16	8	1	7	28	16	25
Zvijezda	16	6	6	4	22	17	24
Leotar	16	7	1	8	15	25	22
Zeljeznicar	16	6	3	7	15	17	21
Borac	16	6	2	8	19	18	20
Celik	16	5	4	7	11	19	19
Orasje	16	4	5	7	18	21	17
Modrica	16	4	4	8	17	24	16
Travnik	16	4	4	8	17	28	16
Posusje	16	3	6	7	21	30	15
Velez	16	4	2	10	16	24	14

BULGARIA

Late starters

The Bulgarian football federation were forced to postpone the resumption of top-flight football due to adverse weather conditions.

CROATIA

Hajduk overtake Dinamo to head table

Dinamo lost top spot as the Croatian league resumed when they went down 2-0 at second-place Hajduk.

A penalty on the stroke of half-time from Nikola Kalinic and a second goal shortly after the interval by Senijad Ibrici saw the team from Split leapfrog their rivals from Zagreb to establish a two-point lead.

CYPRUS

Anorthosis close in

Lukasz Sosin hit four for Anothosis in a 6-1 triumph at bottom club Atromitos as the defending champions closed the gap on leaders APOEL.

Both teams were assured of places in the title play-offs with two games remaining.

62 goals conceded by Atromitos of Cyprus

CZECH REPUBLIC

Slavia's lucky seven

Six points clear in the league before the spring restart, Slavia returned to action with seven new signings and stretched their lead over the chasing pack to 10 points.

DENMARK

Capital clubs in control

After a three-month winter break, the league got back under way with OB keeping up their challenge to the big two from Copenhagen.

Leaders Brondby have a new coach in Kent Nielsen.

Hajduk hero...Kalinic

BULGARIA

BULGARIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Levski	15	10	3	2	26	7	33
CSKA	15	9	5	1	26	12	32
Lovech	15	8	4	3	22	13	28
Cherno More	15	8	2	5	24	12	26
Sliven	15	6	6	3	20	15	24
Lok Sofia	15	6	4	5	13	13	22
Lok Mezdra	15	6	3	6	20	16	21
Slavia	15	6	2	7	18	17	20
Chernomorets	15	4	7	4	18	19	19
Pirin	15	5	3	7	15	21	18
Minyor	15	4	5	6	11	18	17
Vihren	15	5	1	9	11	18	16
Lok Plovdiv	15	3	6	6	17	24	15
Botev	15	3	6	6	14	21	15
Spartak Varna	15	2	5	8	10	23	11
Belasitsa	15	2	4	9	9	25	10

CROATIA

Feb 22: Zadar 2 Cibalia 1; Varteks 2 Sesvete 1; Zagreb 0 Inter 1; Slaven 3 Sibenik 1; Osijek 2 Rijeka 2; Hajduk 2 Dinamo 0.
Mar 1: Sibenik 1 Osijek 1; Dinamo 1 Slaven 0; Inter 0 Hajduk 4; Sesvete 1 Zagreb 4; Cibalia 1 Varteks 0; Rijeka 2 Zadar 1.

CROATIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hajduk	20	14	2	4	37	17	44
Dinamo	20	13	3	4	39	19	42
Slaven	20	9	4	7	28	24	31
Sibenik	20	8	5	7	29	20	29
Rijeka	20	8	5	7	25	23	29
Varteks	20	8	3	9	27	29	27
Zagreb	20	7	6	7	23	27	27
Osijek	20	6	7	7	28	27	25
Cibalia	20	7	3	10	19	33	24
Inter	20	5	6	9	30	37	21
Sesvete	20	5	4	11	24	38	19
Zadar	20	4	4	12	16	31	16

CYPRUS

Feb 7: Ethnikos 1 AEP 3; Doxa 1 Omonia 2; APOEL 3 Alki 1.
Feb 8: AEL 1 AEK 0; Atromitos 3 Apollon 6; Anorthosis 1 ENP 0.
Feb 9: APEP 0 APOP 1.
Feb 14: APOP 2 Doxa 1; ENP 4 APEP 0; Alki 0 Anorthosis 2.
Feb 15: Apollon 0 APOEL 1; AEK 5 Atromitos 0; Omonia 1 Ethnikos 0.
Feb 16: AEP 0 AEL 1.
Feb 18: Ethnikos 2 AEK 1.
Feb 21: APEP 2 Alki 1; APOEL 4 Atromitos 0; Ethnikos 1 APOP 4; AEP 0 AEK 3; Doxa 0 ENP 1; Anorthosis 2 Apollon 1.
Feb 22: AEL 0 Omonia 2.
Feb 28: APOP 1 AEL 3; Alki 1 Doxa 2; AEK 0 APOEL 1; ENP 0 Ethnikos 4; Apollon 1 APEP 1.
Mar 1: Atromitos 1 Anorthosis 6; Omonia 0 AEP 0.

CYPRUS	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
APOEL	24	20	3	1	47	13	63
Omonia	24	20	1	3	57	15	61
Anorthosis	24	19	2	3	45	16	59
Apollon	24	12	3	9	49	31	39
AEL	24	12	3	9	31	28	39
Ethnikos	24	10	7	7	31	29	37
APOP	24	11	3	10	31	33	36
Doxa	24	7	6	11	30	36	27
AEP	24	5	10	9	28	36	25
ENP	24	6	5	13	22	42	23
APEP	24	4	8	12	26	39	20
Alki	24	4	7	13	25	46	19
AEK	24	3	6	15	25	38	15
Atromitos	24	1	4	19	17	62	7

CZECH REPUBLIC

Feb 22: Zizkov 1 Zlin 1; Teplice 1 Liberec 0; Ceske Budejovice 2 Pribram 2; Brno 2 Ostrava 0; Kladno 1 Bohemians 0; Olomouc 0 Sparta 1; Mlada Boleslav 1 Jablonec 2.
Feb 23: Slavia 3 Plzen 2.
Feb 28: Plzen 0 Liberec 2; Zlin 0 Kladno 0; Ostrava 0 Zizkov 0; Sparta 0 Ceske Budejovice 0.
Mar 1: Jablonec 1 Olomouc 0; Bohemians 0 Slavia 0.

CZECH REPUBLIC	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slavia	18	12	5	1	40	13	41
Ostrava	18	9	4	5	30	18	31
Sparta	18	9	4	5	28	17	31
M Boleslav	17	9	4	4	24	18	31
Liberec	18	8	5	5	23	18	29
Jablonec	18	8	4	6	19	21	28
Olomouc	18	7	5	6	21	23	26
Teplice	17	7	4	6	18	14	25
Brno	17	6	5	6	19	16	23
Plzen	18	5	7	6	25	24	22
Bohemians	18	6	2	10	23	30	20
C Budejovice	18	3	11	4	16	24	20
Pribram	17	5	4	8	19	23	19
Kladno	18	4	5	9	10	27	17
Zizkov	18	3	4	11	17	27	13
Zlin	18	2	5	11	9	28	11

DENMARK

Feb 28: Midtjylland 1 Esbjerg 1.
Mar 1: OB 2 SonderjyskE 0; Vejle 1 Nordsjaelland 1; AGF 1 Randers 2; Horsens 0 AaB 1.

DENMARK	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brondby	17	12	3	2	30	13	39
OB	18	12	2	4	34	18	38
Copenhagen	17	11	4	2	32	12	37
Midtjylland	18	9	5	4	27	20	32
AaB	18	7	5	6	24	25	26
Randers	18	5	9	4	29	23	24
AGF	18	7	3	8	21	24	24
Nordsjaelland	18	4	5	9	20	28	17
SonderjyskE	18	3	6	9	14	31	15
Esbjerg	18	2	8	8	16	24	14
Vejle	18	2	7	9	13	28	13
Horsens	18	2	5	11	17	31	11

ESM Team of the Month

European Sports Magazines FEBRUARY 2009

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Magazines group vote for their first XI from Europe's top leagues. The players with the most votes make the overall team. For details of how ESM members voted this month, visit: **worldsoccer.com/esm11**

ENGLAND

Reds go marching on

Manchester United added the League Cup to the Club World Cup as they attempt to win an unprecedented five trophies in an English season.

United beat Tottenham on penalties at Wembley to claim the League Cup for only the third time in their history.

Ryan Giggs, who signed a one-year contract extension that keeps him at Old Trafford until 2010, was on target in the league win at West Ham – a goal which means the 35-year-old has scored in all 17 seasons of the Premiership.

However, it is defensively that United have been most impressive. Roque Santa Cruz's goal in Blackburn's 2-1 defeat at United was the first league goal the champions had conceded for 1,333 minutes.

Chelsea moved into second place after Frank Lampard's injury-time winner against Wigan. Liverpool's challenge looks doomed after they lost 2-0 at Middlesbrough.

Arsenal's 0-0 draw with Fulham was the fourth successive league game in which they failed to score.

Three to go...United

FRANCE

Painful landmark

Lyon's Karim Benzema made his 100th Ligue 1 appearance in the game against Rennes, but had to be carried off with an abdominal injury as the visitors

Agony...Benzema

ENGLAND

Saturday, February 7
Blackburn 0
Aston Villa 2 (Milner 27, Agbonlahor 90) Att: 24,267

Chelsea 0
Hull 0 Att: 41,802

Everton 3 (Arteta pen 40, Jo 49, pen 90)
Bolton 0 Att: 33,791

Manchester City 1 (Bellamy 51)
Middlesbrough 0 Att: 40,588

Portsmouth 2 (Nugent 62, Hreidarsson 78)
Liverpool 3 (Fabio Aurelio 69, Kuijt 85, Fernando Torres 90) Att: 20,524

Sunderland 2 (Jones 78, Healy 90)
Stoke 0 Att: 38,350

West Bromwich 2 (Fortune 4, 73)
Newcastle 3 (Duff 1, Lovenkrands 9, Taylor 41) Att: 25,817

Wigan 0
Fulham 0 Att: 16,499

Sunday, February 8
Tottenham 0
Arsenal 0 Att: 36,021

West Ham 0
Manchester United 1 (Giggs 62) Att: 34,958

Saturday, February 14
Portsmouth 2 (Johnson 70, Hreidarsson 75)
Manchester City 0 Att: 20,018

Wednesday, February 18
Manchester United 3 (Scholes 12, Berbatov 29, Rooney 62)
Fulham 0 Att: 75,437

Saturday, February 21
Arsenal 0
Sunderland 0 Att: 60,104

Aston Villa 0
Chelsea 1 (Anelka 19) Att: 42,585

Bolton 2 (Taylor 10, K Davies 11)
West Ham 1 (Parker 66) Att: 21,245

Manchester United 2 (Rooney 23, Cristiano Ronaldo 60)
Blackburn 1 (Santa Cruz 32) Att: 75,000

Middlesbrough 0
Wigan 0 Att: 24,020

Stoke 2 (Beattie pen 78, 80)
Portsmouth 2 (Kranjcar 75, Shawcross og 90) Att: 26,354

Sunday, February 22
Fulham 2 (Zamora 61, Johnson 72)
West Bromwich 0 Att: 22,394

Liverpool 1 (Kuijt 78)
Manchester City 1 (Arbeloa og 51) Att: 44,259

Newcastle 0
Everton 0 Att: 47,683

Monday, February 23
Hull 1 (Turner 26)
Tottenham 2 (Lennon 16, Woodgate 85) Att: 24,742

Saturday, February 28
Arsenal 0
Fulham 0 Att: 60,102

Chelsea 2 (Terry 25, Lampard 90)
Wigan 1 (Kapo 82) Att: 40,714

Everton 2 (Cahill 36, Saha 70)
West Bromwich 0 Att: 33,898

Middlesbrough 2 (Xabi Alonso og 32, Tuncay 63)
Liverpool 0 Att: 33,724

Sunday, March 1
Aston Villa 2 (Petrov 45, Carew 79)
Stoke 2 (Shawcross 88, Whelan 90) Att: 39,641

Bolton 1 (Gardner 47)
Newcastle 0 Att: 20,763

Hull 1 (Ashbee 79)
Blackburn 2 (Warnock 34, Andrews 37) Att: 24,612

West Ham 1 (Collison 71)
Manchester City 0 Att: 34,562

ENGLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man Utd	26	19	5	2	46	11	62
Chelsea	27	16	7	4	47	16	55
Liverpool	27	15	10	2	43	20	55
Aston Villa	27	15	7	5	42	27	52
Arsenal	27	12	10	5	38	25	46
Everton	27	12	8	7	36	28	44
West Ham	27	10	6	11	33	34	36
Wigan	27	9	8	10	27	26	35
Fulham	26	8	10	8	24	22	34
Bolton	27	10	3	14	30	36	33
Man City	27	9	5	13	43	36	32
Sunderland	26	8	7	11	27	33	31
Hull	27	7	8	12	33	50	29
Tottenham	26	7	7	12	28	32	28
Newcastle	27	6	10	11	33	43	28
Portsmouth	26	7	7	12	29	43	28
Blackburn	26	6	8	12	30	43	26
Middlesbrough	27	6	8	13	20	36	26
Stoke	27	6	8	13	25	44	26
West Brom	27	6	4	17	24	51	22

LEADING GOALSCORERS

15 Nicolas Anelka (Chelsea)
12 Cristiano Ronaldo (Manchester United)
11 Robinho (Manchester City)
10 Gabriel Agbonlahor (Aston Villa)
10 Kevin Davies (Bolton)
10 Frank Lampard (Chelsea)
10 Amr Zaki (Wigan)

FA CUP – last 32

Replay
Feb 16: Arsenal 4 Cardiff 0.

Last 16

Feb 14: Blackburn 2 Coventry 2; Sheffield United 1 Hull 1; Swansea 1 Fulham 1; Watford 1 Chelsea 3; West Ham 1 Middlesbrough 1.
Feb 15: Derby 1 Manchester United 4; Everton 3 Aston Villa 1.
Still to play: Arsenal v Burnley (March 8)

Replays
Feb 24: Coventry 1 Blackburn 0; Fulham 2 Swansea 1.
Feb 25: Middlesbrough 2 West Ham 0.
Feb 26: Hull 2 Sheffield United 1.

LEAGUE CUP – Final

Mar 1 - Wembley
Manchester United 0
Tottenham 0
Aet. **Att:** 88,217. **Ref:** Foy
Man Utd 4-1 on pens

FRANCE

Saturday, February 7
Le Havre 1 (Alassane 90)
Rennes 0 Att: 12,618

Lille 3 (Frau 60, Richert og 75, Hazard 88)
Sochaux 2 (Pitau 33, Sverkos pen 41) Att: 13,477

Lorient 1 (Abriel 60)
Monaco 1 (Mollo 21) Att: 9,775

Nancy 0
Auxerre 2 (Hengbart 37, Jelen 52) Att: 17,042

Nantes 1 (Abdoun pen 36)
Paris Saint-Germain 4 (Giuly 12, 50, Luyindula 20, Sessegnon 71) Att: 29,688

Saint-Etienne 3 (Gomis 63, Ilan 67, 71)
Caen 2 (Dabo og 2, Savidan 89) Att: 22,520

Toulouse 2 (Sissoko 43, Gignac 80)
Le Mans 0 Att: 14,088

Sunday, February 8
Grenoble 0
Valenciennes 0 Att: 15,925

Marseille 1 (Chamakh og 57)
Bordeaux 0 Att: 53,856

Nice 1 (Apam 45)
Lyon 3 (Makoun 18, 80, Benzema 27) Att: 12,844

Saturday, February 14
Auxerre 2 (Jelen 31, Chafni 35)
Lille 0 Att: 9,753

Bordeaux 1 (Chamakh 59)
Grenoble 1 (Cesar 76) Att: 21,392

Caen 1 (Savidan 34)
Lorient 1 (Saifi 46) Att: 16,665

Le Mans 1 (Helstad 52)
Nice 2 (Fae 76, Traore 89) Att: 8,015

Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Sakho 26, Clement 37)
Saint-Etienne 1 (Payet 34) Att: 42,366

Rennes 1 (Briand 88)
Nancy 1 (Hadji 57) Att: 19,002

Valenciennes 1 (Schmitz 14)
Nantes 1 (Klasnic 60) Att: 11,620

Sunday, February 15
Lyon 3 (Ederson 34, Keita 44, Juninho 74)
Le Havre 1 (Nestor 81) Att: 37,118

Monaco 0
Marseille 1 (Kone 77) Att: 13,475

Sochaux 1 (Afolabi 12)
Toulouse 2 (Faty og 34, Gignac 67) Att: 12,481

Tuesday, February 17
Le Mans 0
Lille 0 Att: 9,269

Nancy 1 (Berenguer 55)
Nice 2 (Traore 49, Hellebuyck 90) Att: 17,257

Valenciennes 2 (Lacourt 10, Danic 90)
Caen 0 Att: 12,206

Saturday, February 21
Grenoble 0
Paris Saint-Germain 0 Att: 18,097

Le Havre 1 (Lesage 37)
Auxerre 2 (Kahlenberg 1, Birsa 79) Att: 12,741

Lorient 1 (Gameiro 23)
Sochaux 2 (Sverkos 66, Erdinc 90) Att: 11,588

Nancy 0
Lyon 2 (Cris 19, Benzema 90) Att: 18,953

Nantes 1 (Bekamenga 44)
Caen 1 (Deroin 3) Att: 21,939

Nice 0
Rennes 1 (Thomert 68) Att: 9,718

Toulouse 0
Valenciennes 0 Att: 18,306

Sunday, February 22
Lille 2 (Obraniak 12, Dumont 90)
Monaco 1 (Malicki og 90+) Att: 12,000

Marseille 0
Le Mans 0 Att: 48,680

Saint-Etienne 1 (Matuidi 53)
Bordeaux 1 (Cavenaghi 90) Att: 27,048

Saturday, February 28
Auxerre 1 (Jelen 26)
Toulouse 1 (Bergougnoux 80) Att: 10,990

Le Mans 2 (Maiga 63, Gervinho 77)
Le Havre 0 Att: 8,918

Nantes 1 (Klasnic 39)
Grenoble 1 (Paillot 90) Att: 23,717

Sochaux 1 (Sverkos 69)
Nice 0 Att: 13,202

Valenciennes 2 (Danic 30, Darcheville 35)
Lille 0 Att: 12,423

Sunday, March 1
Bordeaux 1 (Chamakh 49)
Lorient 0 Att: 22,670

Caen 0
Marseille 1 (Brandao 67) Att: 20,745

Lyon 1 (Kallstrom 66)
Rennes 1 (Briand 90) Att: 34,870

Monaco 2 (Nimani 20, Mollo 90)
Saint-Etienne 2 (Payet 26, Matsui 61) Att: 8,374

Paris Saint-Germain 4 (Hoarau 11, 40, Giuly 13, Sessegnon 63)
Nancy 1 (Feret 30) Att: 42,000

grabbed a late draw through Jimmy Briand.

Two goals from Guillaume Hoarau gave PSG a 4-1 win over Nancy to keep them four points behind Lyon.

GEORGIA

New boost for Dinamo

The arrival of Argentinian left-back Marcos Charras from FC Dallas, Montenegrin Danilo Tomic and Georgian midfielders Aleksandre Koshkadze and Shota Lomia in the winter have helped Dinamo to close the gap on WIT Georgia to four points.

GERMANY

A little too late

Hoffenheim defenders Andreas Ibertsberger and Christoph Janker could be punished for breaking German federation doping guidelines.

The pair were 10 minutes late for drug testing after their side's 1-1 draw at Borussia Monchengladbach and, though they both produced negative tests they could face disciplinary action.

Hoffenheim, meanwhile, continue to keep pace with the leaders in an ever-changing league-title race with just four points keeping the top five teams apart.

It's equally tight down at the bottom where five points separate the bottom five.

Wolfsburg's Ashkan Dejagah has been diagnosed with Hepatitis A. The Germany Under-21 midfielder has been admitted to a specialist hospital and is set to be out for "a very long time" according to his club coach, Felix Magath.

Poorly...Dejagah

78 years since Hertha won the Bundesliga title

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lyon	26	15	8	3	36	17	53
PSG	26	15	4	7	38	25	49
Marseille	26	13	9	4	40	25	48
Bordeaux	26	13	8	5	42	25	47
Toulouse	26	12	10	4	28	17	46
Rennes	26	10	13	3	28	17	43
Lille	26	11	10	5	36	28	43
Nice	26	11	6	9	30	27	39
Lorient	26	7	10	9	30	30	31
Auxerre	26	8	7	11	21	25	31
Le Mans	26	8	6	12	29	35	30
Monaco	26	7	8	11	30	33	29
Grenoble	26	6	11	9	15	23	29
Nancy	26	7	8	11	24	33	29
Nantes	26	7	8	11	24	35	29
Valenciennes	26	6	10	10	23	27	28
Caen	26	5	11	10	29	33	26
Sochaux	26	5	11	10	27	33	26
Saint-Etienne	26	7	5	14	24	38	26
Le Havre	26	4	3	19	19	47	15

LEADING GOALSCORERS

15 Andre-Pierre Gignac (Toulouse)
15 Guillaume Hoarau (Paris Saint-Germain)
13 Fernando Cavenaghi (Bordeaux)
12 Karim Benzema (Lyon)
10 Steve Savidan (Caen)

GEORGIA

Feb 7: Gagra 0 Lokomotivi 0; WIT Georgia 1 Meskheti 0; Mglebi 0 Zestaponi 1.
Feb 8: Borjomi 1 Olimpi 2; Sioni 0 Spartaki 0.
Feb 14: Lokomotivi 3 Spartaki 0; Olimpi 2 Gagra 1.
Feb 15: Zestaponi 1 Borjomi 0; Dinamo 4 Sioni 1; Meskheti 0 Mglebi 0.
Feb 21: Borjomi 0 Meskheti 0; Gagra 1 Zestaponi 3; Sioni 3 Lokomotivi 1; WIT Georgia 1 Dinamo 1; Spartaki 1 Olimpi 1.
Feb 28: WIT Georgia 1 Sioni 1; Olimpi 0 Lokomotivi 0.
Mar 1: Zestaponi 4 Spartaki 1; Meskheti 2 Gagra 0; Dinamo 2 Mglebi 1.

GEORGIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
WIT Georgia	19	12	6	1	32	12	42
Dinamo	18	12	2	4	39	15	38
Zestaponi	18	11	3	4	24	11	36
Olimpi	19	8	9	2	21	12	33
Sioni	19	7	8	4	22	16	29
Lokomotivi	19	8	3	8	24	18	27
Meskheti	19	5	6	8	14	24	21
Mglebi	19	5	4	10	17	25	19
Gagra	20	4	4	12	15	33	16
Borjomi	18	2	6	10	15	36	12
Spartaki	18	2	3	13	13	34	9

GERMANY

Friday, February 6

Arminia Bielefeld 1 (Wichniarek 40)
Hertha Berlin 1 (Voronin 13) Att: 20,700

Saturday, February 7

Bayer Leverkusen 2 (Kiessling 67, Haristeas 90)
Stuttgart 4 (Gomez 3, 75, Hitzlsperger 51, Sinkiewicz og 90) Att: 33,000

Eintracht Frankfurt 2 (Russ 33, Fenin 62)
Koln 2 (Novakovic 57, pen 74) Att: 51,300

Karlsruhe 3 (Freis 49, 90, Federico 53)
Hamburg 2 (Guerrero 6, Benjamin 48) Att: 28,368

Monchengladbach 1 (Baumjohann 44)
Hoffenheim 1 (Wellington 89) Att: 42,421

Schalke 1 (Howedes 48)
Werder Bremen 0 Att: 61,673

Wolfsburg 2 (Dzeko 21, 85)
Bochum 0 Att: 26,177

Sunday, February 8

Bayern Munich 3 (Ze Roberto 24, Klose 88, 90)
Borussia Dortmund 1 (Haedo Valdez 2) Att: 69,000

Energie Cottbus 3 (Rangelov 39, 69, Angelov 73)
Hannover 1 (Fahrenhorst 82) Att: 12,980

Friday, February 13

Hoffenheim 1 (Salihovic pen 31)
Bayer Leverkusen 4 (Helmes 3, 45, Rolfes 12, Castro 48) Att: 30,150

Saturday, February 14

Bochum 2 (Azaouagh 44, Dabrowski 57)
Schalke 1 (Kuranyi 18) Att: 30,605

Eintracht Frankfurt 0
Wolfsburg 2 (Dzeko 9, Misimovic pen 66) Att: 35,600

Hannover 3 (Stajner 43, Krzynowek 45, Forssell 85)
Stuttgart 3 (Gomez 7, Lanig 22, Hitzlsperger 87) Att: 31,127

Hertha Berlin 2 (Voronin 38, 77)
Bayern Munich 1 (Klose 61) Att: 74,244

Koln 0
Karlsruhe 0 Att: 48,000

Werder Bremen 1 (Pizarro 77)
Monchengladbach 1 (Bradley 79) Att: 41,332

Sunday, February 15

Borussia Dortmund 1 (Frei pen 36)
Energie Cottbus 1 (Cagdas 31) Att: 66,300

Hamburg 2 (Trochowski 32, Guerrero 60)
Arminia Bielefeld 0 Att: 53,292

Friday, February 20

Schalke 1 (Kuranyi 20)
Borussia Dortmund 1 (Zidan 81) Att: 61,673

Saturday, February 21

Arminia Bielefeld 1 (Mijatovic 83)
Bochum 1 (Klimowicz 30) Att: 20,200

Bayern Munich 1 (Van Buyten 84)
Koln 2 (Ehret 22, Brosinski 34) Att: 69,000

Energie Cottbus 2 (Iliev 51, Rangelov 90)
Werder Bremen 1 (Hugo Almeida 46) Att: 14,780

Karlsruhe 0
Eintracht Frankfurt 1 (Caio 54) Att: 27,623

Monchengladbach 3 (Baumjohann 36, Marin 43, Neuville 83)
Hannover 2 (Pinto 53, Schulz 77) Att: 36,166

Stuttgart 3 (Cacau 26, Gomez 31, 63)
Hoffenheim 3 (Ba 24, 45, 67) Att: 54,000

Wolfsburg 2 (Dzeko 72, 84)
Hertha Berlin 1 (Cicero 62) Att: 29,300

Sunday, February 22

Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Helmes 29)
Hamburg 2 (Jansen 18, 66) Att: 40,000

Friday, February 27

Koln 1 (Petit 15)
Arminia Bielefeld 1 (Katongo 43) Att: 47,500

Saturday, February 28

Bochum 3 (Epalle 12, Fuchs 54, Pfertzel pen 79)
Energie Cottbus 2 (Iliev 2, Jula 50) Att: 18,103

Borussia Dortmund 0
Hoffenheim 0 Att: 78,800

Eintracht Frankfurt 1 (Fink 81)
Schalke 2 (Rafinha 39, Westermann 83) Att: 51,500

Hannover 1 (Bruggink 33)
Bayer Leverkusen 0 Att: 32,337

Hertha Berlin 2 (Voronin 28, Dardai 44)
Monchengladbach 1 (Bradley pen 69) Att: 48,534

Sunday, March 1

Hamburg 1 (Guerrero 72)
Wolfsburg 3 (Grafite pen 12, 24, Dzeko 76) Att: 57,000

Karlsruhe 0
Stuttgart 2 (Elson 50, Khedira 88) Att: 29,252

Werder Bremen 0
Bayern Munich 0 Att: 42,100

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hertha Berlin	22	13	4	5	35	26	43
Hamburg	22	13	3	6	34	31	42
Hoffenheim	22	12	5	5	49	31	41
Wolfsburg	22	11	6	5	45	28	39
Bayern	22	11	6	5	44	30	39
B Leverkusen	22	11	3	8	44	30	36
Stuttgart	22	10	6	6	40	31	36
Schalke	22	9	7	6	29	21	34
B Dortmund	22	7	12	3	31	25	33
Koln	22	8	5	9	25	30	29
Werder	22	7	7	8	42	34	28
Hannover	22	6	6	10	28	41	24
E Frankfurt	22	6	5	11	28	37	23
Bochum	22	4	9	9	27	36	21
A Bielefeld	22	3	11	8	20	33	20
E Cottbus	22	5	5	12	20	37	20
Karlsruhe	22	5	2	15	18	39	17
M'gladbach	22	4	4	14	24	43	16

ESM
EUROPEAN SPORTS MAGAZINES

GOLDEN SHOE

STANDINGS ON MARCH 1

POS		TEAM	GOALS	FACTOR	PTS
1	Marc Janko	Salzburg (Aut)	31	1.5	46.5
2	Samuel Eto'o	Barcelona (Spa)	23	2	46
3	David Villa	Valencia (Spa)	19	2	38
4	Vedad Ibisevic	Hoffenheim (Ger)	18	2	36
5	Diego Forlan	Atletico Madrid (Spa)	17	2	34
	Lionel Messi	Barcelona (Spa)	17	2	34
7	Marco Di Vaio	Bologna (Ita)	16	2	32
	Patrick Helmes	Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)	16	2	32
9	Kris Boyd	Rangers (Sco)	21	1.5	31.5
10	Nicolas Anelka	Chelsea (Eng)	15	2	30
	Mounir El Hamdaoui	AZ Alkmaar (Hol)	20	1.5	30
	Andre-Pierre Gignac	Toulouse (Fra)	15	2	30
	Alberto Gilardino	Fiorentina (Ita)	15	2	30
	Guillaume Hoarau	Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)	15	2	30
	Diego Milito	Genoa (Ita)	15	2	30
	Alvaro Negredo	Almeria (Spa)	15	2	30
	Vagner Love	CSKA Moscow (Rus)	20	1.5	30
18	Stefan Maierhofer	Rapid Wien (Aut)	19	1.5	28.5
19	Grafite	Wolfsburg (Ger)	14	2	28
	Thierry Henry	Barcelona (Spa)	14	2	28
	Gonzalo Higuain	Real Madrid (Spa)	14	2	28
	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	Internazionale (Ita)	14	2	28
	Raul	Real Madrid (Spa)	14	2	28

Triple...Dosek

GREECE

Cracking start

Czech Republic striker Libor Dosek celebrated his move to Greek football from Sparta Prague during the January transfer window by scoring three times in his first game for new club Skoda Xanthi, against Levadiakos.

Dosek became only the sixth player to score a hat-trick on his Greek top-flight debut – and the first to achieve the feat for a decade.

HOLLAND

Two become one

Second division side Fortuna Sittard are set to merge with top-flight club Roda because of financial difficulties.

It is expected that the new club will start next season playing at Roda's Parkstad ground in Kerkrade.

56 **Milan v Inter games Paolo Maldini has played in**

HUNGARY

Striker set for Russia

Surprise championship challengers Vasas could find their hopes resting on the success of striker Norbert Nemeth's trial with Tom Tomsk of Russia.

The 27-year-old scored

New start...Parkstad

LEADING GOALSCORERS

18 Vedad Ibisevic (1899 Hoffenheim)
16 Patrick Helmes (Bayer Leverkusen)
14 Grafite (Wolfsburg)
13 Mario Gomez (Stuttgart)
12 Milivoje Novakovic (Koln)
12 Artur Wichniarek (Arminia Bielefeld)

GREECE

Feb 7: Panthrakikos 0 Olympiakos 2; Asteras 3 Panserraikos 0; Aris 1 Panionios 0.
Feb 8: Xanthi 4 Levadiakos 0; Larisa 1 AEK 1; Ergoteiis 0 Iraklis 1; Panathinaikos 3 PAOK 0; Thrasyvoulos 1 OFI 2.
Feb 14: Panionios 0 Ergotelis 0; Levadiakos 0 PAOK 3; Olympiakos 2 Aris 1; AEK 1 Thrasyvoulos 0.
Feb 15: OFI 1 Asteras 1; Panthrakikos 0 Larisa 1; Panserraikos 1 Xanthi 0; Iraklis 0 Panathinaikos 0.
Feb 21: Xanthi 0 OFI 0; PAOK 1 Iraklis 0; Panathinaikos 2 Panionios 1.
Feb 22: Panserraikos 1 Levadiakos 0; Larisa 1 Aris 1; Thrasyvoulos 0 Panthrakikos 2; Ergotelis 1 Olympiakos 0; Asteras 0 AEK 1.
Feb 28: Larisa 3 Ergotelis 2; AEK 2 Xanthi 1; Aris 2 Thrasyvoulos 1.
Mar 1: Levadiakos 3 Iraklis 0; OFI 0 Panserraikos 0; Panionios 1 PAOK 2; Panthrakikos 0 Asteras 0; Olympiakos 0 Panathinaikos 0.

GREECE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos	24	18	4	2	38	10	58
PAOK	24	14	7	3	29	13	49
Panathinaikos	24	13	8	3	41	16	47
AEK	24	11	11	2	29	19	44
Larisa	24	9	11	4	32	23	38
Aris	24	9	8	7	20	22	35
Xanthi	24	6	11	7	18	15	29
Panionios	24	8	5	11	28	30	29
Panthrakikos	24	8	5	11	14	24	29
Ergotelis	24	7	6	11	24	34	27
Asteras	24	5	11	8	23	22	26
Iraklis	24	6	8	10	16	24	26
Levadiakos	24	7	4	13	20	28	25
Panserraikos	24	5	7	12	13	30	22
OFI	24	4	8	12	24	37	20
Thrasyvoulos	24	3	4	17	18	40	13

HOLLAND

Feb 7: Roda JC 0 Sparta 1; Heerenveen 3 NAC 1; AZ 3 Willem II 1; Heracles 1 NEC 1.
Feb 8: Utrecht 3 Den Haag 1; Vitesse 4 Ajax 1; Feyenoord 0 Groningen 0; De Graafschap 2 Twente 2; Volendam 3 PSV 5.
Feb 13: Willem II 0 Utrecht 2.
Feb 14: Den Haag 1 De Graafschap 0; PSV 2 AZ 2; Twente 2 Volendam 1; NAC 1 Roda JC 0.
Feb 15: Ajax 2 Feyenoord 0; Sparta 0 Vitesse 0; NEC 1 Heerenveen 1; Groningen 2 Heracles 0.
Feb 20: Vitesse 3 Roda JC 0.
Feb 21: Heerenveen 3 Willem II 1; Den Haag 1 NAC 1; Heracles 0 AZ 2; Groningen 0 PSV 1.
Feb 22: Utrecht 0 NEC 2; De Graafschap 0 Feyenoord 2; Sparta 1 Twente 2; Ajax 2 Volendam 1.
Feb 27: PSV 2 Heerenveen 3.
Feb 28: Willem II 0 Heracles 3; NAC 3 Sparta 1; Roda JC 3 De Graafschap 1; AZ 3 Groningen 0.
Mar 1: Utrecht 0 Ajax 2; Feyenoord 2 Vitesse 2; Twente 1 Den Haag 0; Volendam 1 NEC 1.

HOLLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AZ	25	20	3	2	54	14	63
Twente	25	16	6	3	48	23	54
Ajax	25	16	3	6	54	28	51
Heerenveen	25	14	6	5	52	44	48
PSV	25	13	6	6	52	28	45
Groningen	25	12	4	9	43	29	40
NAC	25	11	6	8	37	38	39
Utrecht	25	10	7	8	35	30	37
NEC	25	9	9	7	33	27	36
Vitesse	25	7	9	9	28	35	30
Feyenoord	25	7	7	11	37	35	28
Heracles	25	6	8	11	27	40	26
Willem II	25	7	4	14	28	43	25
Sparta	25	6	6	13	37	53	24
Den Haag	25	6	5	14	25	40	23
Roda JC	25	5	6	14	28	45	21
De Graafschap	25	4	5	16	16	50	17
Volendam	25	4	4	17	28	60	16

HUNGARY

Feb 21: Vasas 3 Honved 1; MTK 2 Kaposvar 1; Diosgyor 2 Rakospalota 1; Paks 2 Kecskemet 2; Fehervar 2 Siofok 1.
Feb 22: Nyiregyhaza 1 Ujpest 3.

HUNGARY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Debrecen	15	10	3	2	33	14	33
Ujpest	16	9	6	1	30	18	33
Vasas	16	10	1	5	30	24	31
Szombathely	15	7	3	5	22	13	24
Nyiregyhaza	16	6	6	4	21	17	24
Fehervar	16	7	3	6	19	20	24
Kecskemet	16	6	4	6	25	21	22
Zalaegerszeg	15	6	4	5	25	22	22
MTK	16	6	4	6	22	23	22
Diosgyor	16	6	4	6	19	27	22
Kaposvar	16	6	3	7	27	23	21
Honved	16	5	4	7	23	28	19
Paks	16	5	4	7	23	33	19
Gyor	15	5	3	7	23	19	18
Siofok	16	2	2	12	10	29	8
Rakospalota	16	2	2	12	20	41	8

ISRAEL

Feb 7: Bnei Yehuda 1 Netanya 1; Ironi Kiryat Shmona 1 Maccabi Tel Aviv 2; Ashdod 1 Maccabi Petach Tikva 1; Hapoel Petach Tikva 1 Bnei Sakhnin 1; Maccabi Haifa 2 Ramat Gan 0.
Feb 9: Hapoel Tel Aviv 4 Beitar 0.
Feb 21: Maccabi Tel Aviv 1 Hapoel Petach Tikva 2; Maccabi Petach Tikva 1 Hapoel Tel Aviv 1; Bnei Sakhnin 0 Ashdod 2; Ramat Gan 1 Ironi Kiryat Shmona 0; Beitar 1 Bnei Yehuda 0.
Feb 23: Netanya 2 Maccabi Haifa 0.
Feb 28: Bnei Yehuda 1 Maccabi Petach Tikva 0; Ironi Kiryat Shmona 1 Maccabi Haifa 0; Hapoel Petach Tikva 1 Ramat Gan 0; Ashdod 1 Maccabi Tel Aviv 0; Hapoel Tel Aviv 1 Bnei Sakhnin 0.

ISRAEL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
M Haifa	21	11	6	4	33	20	39
H Tel Aviv	21	10	8	3	30	15	38
Netanya	20	9	9	2	30	19	36
Beitar*	20	8	9	3	26	19	31
Bnei Yehuda	21	9	4	8	22	19	31
M P Tikva	21	6	11	4	20	18	29
Ashdod	21	8	4	9	34	34	28
H P Tikva	21	7	4	10	22	28	25
M Tel Aviv	21	5	8	8	18	22	23
Ironi K S	21	4	7	10	12	25	19
Bnei Sakhnin	21	4	6	11	14	26	18
Ramat Gan	21	3	6	12	17	33	15

**2pts deducted*

ITALY

Saturday, February 7
Lecce 0
Inter 3 (Ibrahimovic 12, Figo 72, Stankovic 82) Att: 28,100

Milan 1 (Kaka pen 67)
Reggina 1 (Di Gennaro 33) Att: 53,182

Sunday, February 8
Cagliari 0
Atalanta 1 (Cigarini 66) Att: 9,800

Catania 1 (Morimoto 51)
Juventus 2 (Iaquinta 11, Poulsen 90) Att: 19,775

Fiorentina 1 (Gilardino 89)
Lazio 0 Att: 28,787

Palermo 2 (Migliaccio 2, Simplicio 14)
Napoli 1 (Hamsik 43) Att: 20,185

Roma 3 (Cicinho 26, Vucinic 47, Julio Baptista 90)
Genoa 0 Att: 41,648

Sampdoria 2 (Bellucci 45, Pazzini 51)
Siena 2 (Vergassola 21, Maccarone 79) Att: 21,118

Torino 1 (Ventola 64)
Chievo 1 (Italiano 83) Att: 15,217

Udinese 1 (Sanchez 90)
Bologna 0 Att: 13,100

Saturday, February 14
Lazio 1 (Siviglia 75)
Torino 1 (Abate 36) Att: 23,200

Napoli 1 (Maggio 20)
Bologna 1 (Di Vaio 23) Att: 30,100

Sunday, February 15
Atalanta 3 (Capelli 52, Doni 56, 59)
Roma 0 Att: 10,450

Cagliari 2 (Fini 49, Matri 90)
Lecce 0 Att: 10,100

Chievo 1 (Colucci 90)
Catania 1 (Ledesma pen 10) Att: 9,251

Genoa 3 (Thiago Motta 12, Palladino 38, Milito pen 56)
Fiorentina 3 (Mutu pen 60, 80, 90) Att: 27,253

Inter 2 (Adriano 29, Stankovic 43)
Milan 1 (Alexandre Pato 71) Att: 76,178

Juventus 1 (Amauri 62)
Sampdoria 1 (Pazzini 10) Att: 23,066

Reggina 0
Palermo 0 Att: 9,872

Siena 1 (Maccarone 50)
Udinese 1 (Di Natale 72) Att: 9,272

Saturday, February 21
Bologna 1 (Britos 79)
Inter 2 (Cambiasso 57, Balotelli 82)

Palermo 0
Juventus 2 (Sissoko 27, Trezeguet 79) Att: 35,293

Roma 1 (Taddei 63)
Siena 0

Sunday, February 22
Catania 2 (Capuano 35, Potenza 74)
Reggina 0 Att: 16,939

Fiorentina 2 (Gilardino 73, Mutu 90)
Chievo 1 (Morero 13) Att: 27,599

Lecce 0
Lazio 2 (Foggia 10, Kolarov 50) Att: 7,118

Milan 1 (Seedorf 65)
Cagliari 0 Att: 56,188

Napoli 0
Genoa 1 (Jankovic 69) Att: 39,824

Sampdoria 1 (Pazzini 61)
Atalanta 0 Att: 20,387

Torino 1 (Dellafiore 80)
Udinese 0 Att: 16,087

Saturday, February 28
Juventus 1 (Marchisio 44)
Napoli 0 Att: 20,000

Lazio 2 (Zarate 36, 81)
Bologna 0

Sunday, March 1
Atalanta 0
Chievo 2 (Langella 78, Pellissier pen 89) Att: 10,211

Cagliari 0
Torino 0

Inter 3 (Balotelli 50, pen 63, Crespo 79)
Roma 3 (De Rossi 23, Riise 29, Brighi 57) Att: 51,497

Palermo 0
Catania 4 (Ledesma 14, Morimoto 37, Mascara 44, Paolucci 65) Att: 21,287

Reggina 1 (Sestu 20)
Fiorentina 1 (Bonazzoli 22) Att: 9,500

Sampdoria 2 (Cassano 33, Pazzini 51)
Milan 1 (Alexandre Pato 80) Att: 25,402

Siena 0
Genoa 0 Att: 14,059

Udinese 2 (D'Agostino 75, Pasquale 90)
Lecce 0 Att: 16,167

eight goals in 15 games in the autumn and will be sorely missed if the Russian side decide to sign him.

MOLDOVA

Online Olimpia

Mid-table Olimpia have been bought out by an online consortium whose members will decide how the club is run via email.

The club also hope to attract new players for trials in a similar way.

SCOTLAND

Only goal difference separates Old Firm

A 0-0 draw at home in the derby game in February kept Celtic two points clear at the top of the table – until a second draw, away to Motherwell, allowed Rangers to go top on goal difference.

However, Celtic made an impressive start in their bid to catch their arch-rivals by scoring seven times in their next league fixture, against St Mirren.

135 derby games between Red Star and Partizan

SERBIA

Belgrade's big one

Partizan drew 1-1 at home to Red Star in the Eternal Derby but still stretched their lead at the top of the table to four points as second-placed Vojvodina lost.

Red Star took the lead against their rivals through Dorde Tutoric, but Almani Moreira rescued a point with a late equaliser.

All square...Scotland's Old Firm

ITALY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter	26	18	6	2	47	21	60
Juventus	26	16	5	5	42	21	53
Milan	26	14	6	6	43	27	48
Fiorentina	26	14	4	8	38	25	46
Genoa	26	12	9	5	36	25	45
Roma	26	13	5	8	40	34	44
Cagliari	26	11	5	10	32	27	38
Lazio	26	11	5	10	37	37	38
Atalanta	26	11	3	12	31	28	36
Palermo	26	11	3	12	32	35	36
Napoli	26	10	5	11	32	30	35
Udinese	26	9	7	10	36	37	34
Catania	26	9	6	11	28	30	33
Sampdoria	26	8	8	10	26	30	32
Siena	26	7	7	12	19	26	28
Torino	26	5	9	12	25	39	24
Bologna	26	5	8	13	27	42	23
Chievo	26	5	8	13	20	35	23
Lecce	26	4	10	12	22	41	22
Reggina	26	3	9	14	21	44	18

LEADING GOALSCORERS

16 Marco Di Vaio (Bologna)
15 Alberto Gilardino (Fiorentina)
15 Diego Milito (Genoa)
14 Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Inter)

MACEDONIA

Mar 1: Sileks 1 Pelister 0; Metalurg 2 Pobeda 1; Turnovo 1 Vardar 0; Makedonija 1 Renova 1; Napredok 3 Milano 1.

MACEDONIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Makedonija	17	11	5	1	33	9	38
Milano	17	9	3	5	29	20	30
Renova	17	8	6	3	18	16	30
Rabotnicki	17	7	8	2	26	12	29
Vardar	17	6	6	5	23	16	24
Sileks	18	4	8	6	21	21	20
Turnovo	17	5	5	7	12	26	20
Metalurg	18	4	5	9	14	21	17
Napredok	17	4	5	8	20	31	17
Pobeda	18	4	4	10	15	29	16
Pelister	17	4	3	10	14	24	15

MOLDOVA

Feb 28: Sheriff 2 Iskra-Stal 0.

MOLDOVA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sheriff	19	16	1	2	39	10	49
Dacia	18	12	2	4	29	13	38
Zimbru	18	10	4	4	32	13	34
Iskra-Stal	18	8	6	4	17	9	30
Olimpia	18	6	5	7	16	22	23
Nistru	18	6	3	9	22	26	21
Dinamo	18	5	6	7	22	29	21
Tiligul	18	6	2	10	19	37	20
FC Tiraspol	18	5	2	11	22	26	17
CSCA-Rapid	18	4	3	11	20	34	15
Academia	19	4	2	13	14	33	14

MONTENEGRO

MONTENEGRO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mogren	18	12	3	3	35	17	39
Buducnost	18	11	2	5	39	24	35
Grbalj	18	9	4	5	24	14	31
Sutjeska	18	9	3	6	22	18	30
Zeta	18	9	3	6	24	22	30
Rudar	18	9	1	8	26	22	28
Lovcen	18	6	6	6	15	12	24
OFK	18	6	4	8	24	29	22
Kom	18	5	6	7	16	19	21
Jezero	18	5	4	9	14	31	19
Jedinstvo	18	3	5	10	15	26	14
Decic	18	3	1	14	9	29	10

NORTHERN IRELAND

NORTHERN IRELAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Linfield	30	19	6	5	53	22	63
Glentoran	29	18	7	4	46	27	61
Crusaders	30	13	11	6	54	34	50
Coleraine	31	14	5	12	43	43	47
Lisburn	30	13	7	10	42	32	46
Cliftonville	30	10	10	10	43	37	40
Institute	29	10	7	12	32	42	37
Ballymena	30	9	7	14	31	41	34
Bangor	31	9	6	16	37	54	33
Newry	28	6	10	12	32	46	28
Dungannon	30	6	9	15	37	53	27
Glenavon	30	7	5	18	36	55	26

POLAND

Feb 27: Polonia Bytom 1 Wisla 1; Polonia Warsaw 0 Legia 0.
Feb 28: Cracovia 1 Piast 0; Ruch 0 Gornik 1; Lechia 1 Slask 1; Jagiellonia 3 Arka 0.
Mar 1: Odra 0 LKS 1; Belchatow 2 Lech 3.

POLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lech	18	12	3	3	35	13	39
Legia	18	11	4	3	31	10	37
Polonia W	18	10	6	2	25	9	36
Wisla	18	10	4	4	29	14	34
Slask	18	8	7	3	27	21	31
Belchatow	18	10	1	7	24	21	31
Arka	18	6	5	7	16	20	23
Polonia B	18	6	4	8	22	27	22
Ruch	18	6	4	8	12	18	22
Jagiellonia	18	5	6	7	16	19	21
Lechia	18	5	4	9	16	27	19
LKS	18	5	4	9	12	24	19
Odra	18	4	5	9	14	23	17
Cracovia	18	4	5	9	11	21	17
Piast	18	4	3	11	8	18	15
Gornik	18	4	3	11	9	22	15

PORTUGAL

Feb 6: Leixoes 2 Trofense 0.
Feb 7: Estrela Amadora 0 Setubal 0.
Feb 8: Rio Ave 1 Academica 0; Guimaraes 2 Maritimo 1; Naval 0 Nacional 4; Sporting Lisbon 2 Sporting Braga 3; Porto 1 Benfica 1.
Feb 9: Pacos Ferreira 1 Belenenses 1.
Feb 13: Nacional 3 Guimaraes 0.
Feb 14: Maritimo 1 Estrela Amadora 0; Sporting Braga 0 Leixoes 1; Belenenses 1 Sporting Lisbon 2.
Feb 15: Trofense 2 Naval 2; Porto 3 Rio Ave 1; Benfica 3 Pacos Ferreira 2.
Feb 16: Setubal 2 Academica 1.
Feb 20: Pacos Ferreira 0 Porto 2.
Feb 21: Rio Ave 1 Setubal 0; Sporting Lisbon 3 Benfica 2.
Feb 22: Academica 3 Maritimo 1; Estrela Amadora 1 Nacional 0; Guimaraes 0 Trofense 1; Naval 1 Braga 2.
Feb 23: Leixoes 2 Belenenses 2.
Feb 27: Benfica 2 Leixoes 1.
Feb 28: Porto 0 Sporting Lisbon 0; Pacos Ferreira 2 Rio Ave 0; Nacional 3 Academica 1.
Mar 1: Maritimo 5 Setubal 1; Trofense 1 Estrela Amadora 1; Belenenses 1 Naval 2.

PORTUGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Porto	20	12	6	2	35	14	42
Benfica	20	11	7	2	34	19	40
Sporting L	20	11	5	4	26	14	38
Nacional	20	10	5	5	33	21	35
Leixoes	20	9	8	3	23	16	35
S Braga	19	9	5	5	21	12	32
Maritimo	20	9	5	6	26	20	32
E Amadora	20	6	7	7	16	22	25
Guimaraes	19	6	6	7	19	22	24
Naval	20	6	5	9	19	25	23
Academica	20	5	6	9	17	23	21
P Ferreira	20	5	4	11	25	34	19
Trofense	20	4	6	10	17	26	18
Rio Ave	20	4	4	12	13	25	16
Belenenses	20	3	7	10	18	32	16
Setubal	20	4	4	12	12	29	16

PORTUGUESE CUP – quarter-finals

Feb 17: Guimaraes 0 Estrela Amadora 1.

ROMANIA

Feb 27: Poli Iasi 1 Univ Craiova 0; Steaua 1 Vaslui 1.
Feb 28: Urziceni 0 Brasov 0; Timisoara 2 Arges 1; Farul 2 Gloria Buzau 0; Otelul 3 Gaz Metan 1.
Mar 1: Gloria Bistrita 1 Rapid 3; CFR 1 Otopeni 0; Dinamo 3 Pandurii 0.

ROMANIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	18	12	2	4	28	13	38
Urziceni	18	11	2	5	28	14	35
Timisoara*	18	11	5	2	34	21	32
CFR	18	9	5	4	25	13	32
Rapid	18	9	4	5	25	18	31
Steaua	18	7	9	2	25	14	30
Univ Craiova	18	7	7	4	23	17	28
Arges	18	8	3	7	25	23	27
Otelul	18	7	5	6	25	21	26
Vaslui	18	7	5	6	20	17	26
Brasov	18	5	9	4	14	13	24
Farul	18	6	4	8	16	24	22
Gloria Bistrita	18	6	3	9	18	20	21
Pandurii	18	5	6	7	17	25	21
Poli Iasi	18	5	4	9	14	25	19
Gaz Metan	18	4	3	11	19	34	15
Otopeni	18	2	3	13	14	32	9
Gloria Buzau	18	0	3	15	6	32	3

6pts deducted for non-compliance with CAS ruling relating to club identity

SCOTLAND

Feb 14: St Mirren 2 Falkirk 2; Hearts 2 Aberdeen 1; Kilmarnock 1 Hibernian 1; Dundee United 1 Inverness 1; Motherwell 1 Hamilton 0.
Feb 15: Celtic 0 Rangers 0.
Feb 21: Rangers 3 Kilmarnock 1; Inverness 2 Hibernian 0; Falkirk 1 Hamilton 2; Hearts 1 St Mirren 1; Aberdeen 2 Dundee United 2.
Feb 22: Motherwell 1 Celtic 1.
Feb 28: Aberdeen 0 Kilmarnock 0; Celtic 7 St Mirren 0; Dundee United 0 Hearts 1; Hamilton 0 Rangers 1; Hibernian 0 Falkirk 0; Inverness 1 Motherwell 2.

SCOTLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rangers	27	18	6	3	57	19	60
Celtic	27	18	6	3	60	26	60
Hearts	27	13	6	8	29	28	45
Dundee Utd	27	10	10	7	36	34	40
Aberdeen	27	11	6	10	32	29	39
Motherwell	27	10	6	11	31	35	36
Hibernian	27	8	9	10	31	35	33
Hamilton	27	10	2	15	25	39	32
Kilmarnock	27	8	5	14	25	36	29
St Mirren	27	7	7	13	22	38	28
Falkirk	27	5	9	13	28	39	24
Inverness	27	6	4	17	26	44	22

SCOTTISH CUP – last 16

Feb 7: Celtic 2 Queens Park 1; Hamilton 2 Dundee United 1; Hearts 0 Falkirk 1; Inverness 2 Kilmarnock 0; Motherwell 1 St Mirren 1.
Feb 17: Aberdeen 5 East Fife 0; Airdrie 1 Dunfermline 2.
Feb 18: Forfar 0 Rangers 4.

Replay
Feb 19: St Mirren 1 Motherwell 0.

SERBIA

Feb 28: Partizan 1 Red Star 1; Napredak 2 Vojvodina 1; OFK 1 Rad 1; Jagodina 1 Cukaricki 2; Banat 0 Borac 0.
Mar 1: Hajduk 1 Javor 1.

SERBIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Partizan	18	11	5	2	33	9	38
Vojvodina	18	11	1	6	21	12	34
Red Star	18	9	4	5	30	19	31
Javor	18	8	7	3	24	16	31
Hajduk	18	6	6	6	15	15	24
Borac	18	5	9	4	16	17	24
OFK	18	6	4	8	15	27	22
Jagodina	18	6	2	10	16	28	20
Cukaricki	18	5	4	9	16	21	19
Rad	18	3	9	6	13	17	18
Banat	18	4	5	9	12	22	17
Napredak	18	4	4	10	15	23	16

SLOVAKIA

SLOVAKIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slovan	18	12	4	2	39	12	40
Zilina	18	11	3	4	34	12	36
Spartak	18	9	6	3	26	18	33
Kosice	18	7	6	5	27	25	27
Dunajska S	18	7	6	5	22	21	27
Ruzomberok	18	6	7	5	25	20	25
Tatran	18	6	5	7	19	28	23
Banska B	18	5	5	8	15	18	20
Dubnica	18	5	4	9	23	26	19
Artmedia	18	4	6	8	23	29	18
Nitra	18	4	3	11	15	34	15
Zlate Moravce	18	2	5	11	9	34	11

SLOVENIA

Feb 20: Gorica 0 Rudar 1.
Feb 21: Nafta 2 Primorje 0; Maribor 2 Drava 1; Interblock 1 Koper 1.
Feb 22: Celje 0 Domzale 1.
Feb 28: Rudar 2 Interblock 1; Nafta 0 Celje 0.
Mar 1: Primorje 0 Koper 0; Drava 2 Gorica 2; Domzale 3 Maribor 3.

SPAIN

Setting new standards

Samuel Eto'o's two goals in Barcelona's 2-2 draw away to Real Betis made him only the third player in the club's history to score 100 goals in La Liga.

Cesar Rodriguez scored 195 between 1942 and 1954, while Ladislao Kubala hit the net 131 times from 1951 to 1961. Remarkably, Eto'o has managed to reach the century milestone in less than five years at Camp Nou.

Meanwhile, Real Madrid's Iker Casillas equalled Francisco Buyo's record of 454 appearances in goal for the club during Real's 1-0 win against Racing Santander.

Ton up...Eto'o

SWITZERLAND

Young Boys march on

After losing three of their opening four league games, Young Boys' run of 14 games unbeaten has lifted them to third in the table.

A 3-2 victory at Sion was their fourth straight win and put Vladimir Petkovic's side three points behind Zurich.

TURKEY

Sivasspor stopped

Fenerbahce twice came from behind to beat league leaders Sivasspor 4-2 and cut their lead to five points.

Ugur Boral (twice), Semih Senturk and Diego Lugano were on target for Fener.

Clash...Young Boys tackle Sion (white)

SLOVENIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maribor	22	12	8	2	46	28	44
Celje	22	10	7	5	32	22	37
Nafta	22	10	7	5	27	21	37
Rudar	22	9	4	9	30	25	31
Domzale	22	7	9	6	29	26	30
Gorica	22	9	3	10	34	37	30
Interblock	22	7	7	8	29	31	28
Drava	22	5	5	12	20	31	20
Koper	22	4	8	10	23	37	20
Primorje	22	3	10	9	21	33	19

SPAIN

Saturday, February 7
Real Madrid 1 (Higuain 49)
Racing Santander 0 Att: 73,000

Sevilla 1 (Kanoute 90)
Betis 2 (Sergio Garcia 70, Oliveira 83) Att: 45,000

Sunday, February 8
Barcelona 3 (Eto'o 23, 40, Daniel Alves 65)
Sporting Gijon 1 (Kike Mateo 68) Att: 69,341

Getafe 1 (Soldado 26)
Espanyol 1 (Ivan Alonso 8) Att: 9,000

Malaga 3 (Luque 48, Salva Ballesta 64, 72)
Almeria 2 (Uche 26, Negredo 45) Att: 19,000

Mallorca 1 (Aduriz 56)
Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Verdu pen 77) Att: 15,000

Osasuna 1 (Miguel Flano 57)
Valencia 0 Att: 19,000

Recreativo 0
Atletico Madrid 3 (Aguero 3, Forlan 28, 35) Att: 17,374

Valladolid 2 (Victor pen 39, 58)
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Orbaiz 64) Att: 21,300

Villarreal 2 (Rossi 16, 67)
Numancia 1 (Aranda 40) Att: 15,000

Saturday, February 14
Betis 2 (Melli 17, Gonzalez 25)
Barcelona 2 (Eto'o 45, 86) Att: 40,000

Deportivo La Coruna 0
Osasuna 0 Att: 14,000

Valencia 1 (Villa 53)
Malaga 1 (Albiol og 59) Att: 30,000

Sunday, February 15
Almeria 3 (Crusat 62, Uche 70, Negredo 79)
Valladolid 2 (Pedro Leon 18, Goitom 22) Att: 12,000

Athletic Bilbao 1 (Javi Martinez 51)
Recreativo 1 (Aitor 33) Att: 35,000

Atletico Madrid 1 (Forlan 33)
Getafe 1 (Albin 88) Att: 18,157

Espanyol 0
Sevilla 2 (Kanoute 84, 90) Att: 29,180

Numancia 0
Mallorca 1 (Aduriz 22) Att: 7,500

Racing Santander 1 (Zigic 25)
Villarreal 1 (Cazorla 43) Att: 18,157

Sporting Gijon 0
Real Madrid 4 (Raul 15, 76, Huntelaar 37, Marcelo 49) Att: 24,000

Saturday, February 21
Barcelona 1 (Toure 62)
Espanyol 2 (De la Pena 50, 55) Att: 76,942

Real Madrid 6 (Higuain 7, Huntelaar 15, 24, Raul 36, 42, Sergio Ramos 45)
Betis 1 (Oliveira 30) Att: 79,500

Sevilla 1 (Jesus Navas 86)
Atletico Madrid 0 Att: 42,000

Villarreal 2 (Rossi 1+, Capdevila 35)
Sporting Gijon 1 (Bilic 1) Att: 18,000

Sunday, February 22
Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Piscu 79)
Valencia 1 (Villa 24) Att: 18,000

Getafe 1 (Soldado 15)
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Llorente 40) Att: 9,000

Mallorca 1 (Jurado pen 88)
Racing Santander 0 Att: 17,000

Osasuna 2 (Plasil 2, Masoud 35)
Numancia 0 Att: 18,703

Recreativo 1 (Camunas 59)
Almeria 1 (Negredo pen 75)

Valladolid 1 (Oldoni 82)
Malaga 3 (Luque 7, Apono pen 29, Nacho 88) Att: 15,000

Saturday, February 28
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Gabilondo 25)
Sevilla 2 (Kanoute 38, 57) Att: 35,000

Espanyol 0
Real Madrid 2 (Guti 67, Raul 72) Att: 33,950

Sunday, March 1
Almeria 2 (Negredo 16, 64)
Getafe 1 (Guerron 7) Att: 15,000

Atletico Madrid 4 (Forlan 32, pen 79, Aguero 56, 89)
Barcelona 3 (Henry 18, 73, Messi 30)

Betis 2 (Sergio Garcia 42, Oliveira 57)
Villarreal 2 (Cazorla 6, 36) Att: 35,000

Malaga 0
Recreativo 2 (Camunas 54, Adrian Colunga 64) Att: 28,000

Numancia 0
Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Juan Rodriguez 74) Att: 8,000

Racing Santander 1 (Oscar Serrano 13)
Osasuna 1 (Pandiani 45) Att: 15,792

Sporting Gijon 0
Mallorca 1 (Arango 49) Att: 17,000

Valencia 1 (Marchena 73)
Valladolid 2 (Jonathan Sesma 6, Albiol og 31) Att: 30,000

SPAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	25	19	3	3	74	24	60
Real Madrid	25	18	2	5	57	28	56
Sevilla	25	14	5	6	34	22	47
Villarreal	25	11	9	5	40	34	42
At Madrid	25	11	6	8	52	38	39
Valencia	25	11	6	8	45	37	39
Malaga	25	11	6	8	41	37	39
Dep Coruna	25	11	6	8	29	30	39
Valladolid	25	10	3	12	37	40	33
Ath Bilbao	25	8	7	10	35	39	31
Almeria	25	8	7	10	32	39	31
R Santander	25	7	9	9	26	29	30
Recreativo	25	7	8	10	23	34	29
Getafe	25	6	10	9	35	38	28
Betis	25	7	6	12	34	40	27
Mallorca	25	7	6	12	25	40	27
Sporting Gijon	25	9	0	16	30	54	27
Osasuna	25	5	10	10	26	31	25
Espanyol	25	4	9	12	22	40	21
Numancia	25	6	2	17	26	49	20

LEADING GOALSCORERS

23	Samuel Eto'o (Barcelona)
19	David Villa (Valencia)
17	Diego Forlan (Atletico Madrid)
17	Lionel Messi (Barcelona)
15	Alvaro Negredo (Almeria)

SPANISH CUP – semi-finals

1st legs - February 4
Barcelona 2 Mallorca 0
Sevilla 2 Athletic Bilbao 1

2nd legs - March 4

SWITZERLAND

Feb 7: Vaduz 1 Aarau 1; Young Boys 3 Basle 2.
Feb 8: Bellinzona 1 Sion 0; Grasshopper 2 Zurich 2; Neuchatel Xamax 3 Lucerne 3.
Feb 14: Aarau 0 Neuchatel Xamax 0; Zurich 0 Bellinzona 0.
Feb 15: Basle 0 Grasshopper 0; Lucerne 2 Young Boys 3; Sion 2 Vaduz 1.
Feb 18: Sion 1 Lucerne 1; Bellinzona 1 Vaduz 0.
Feb 21: Vaduz 1 Bellinzona 0; Young Boys 4 Aarau 0.
Feb 22: Basle 2 Zurich 1; Grasshopper 1 Lucerne 0; Neuchatel Xamax 3 Sion 2.
Feb 28: Aarau 0 Grasshopper 3; Sion 2 Young Boys 3.
Mar 1: Bellinzona 2 Neuchatel Xamax 0; Lucerne 1 Basle 2; Zurich 5 Vaduz 0.

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zurich	22	14	5	3	50	20	47
Basle	22	14	3	5	42	26	45
Young Boys	22	13	5	4	50	27	44
Grasshopper	21	9	9	3	33	17	36
Aarau	21	6	8	7	22	30	26
Bellinzona	22	6	6	10	21	31	24
Neuchatel X	22	5	8	9	29	35	23
Sion	22	5	6	11	25	39	21
Vaduz	22	4	6	12	13	41	18
Lucerne	22	3	4	15	23	42	13

TURKEY

Feb 6: Trabzonspor 2 Ankaragucu 1.
Feb 7: Hacettepe 2 Eskisehirspor 2; Sivasspor 2 Kocaelispor 0; Galatasaray 1 Kayserispor 1.
Feb 8: Antalyaspor 2 Denizlispor 1; Gaziantepspor 2 Ankaraspor 0; Genclerbirligi 1 Bursaspor 2; Konyaspor 0 Besiktas 0; Istanbul BB 2 Fenerbahce 0.
Feb 14: Ankaragucu 3 Gaziantepspor 1; Eskisehirspor 0 Genclerbirligi 0; Antalyaspor 1 Galatasaray 0; Fenerbahce 7 Hacettepe 0.
Feb 15: Ankaraspor 1 Istanbul BB 2; Denizlispor 2 Konyaspor 1; Kocaelispor 1 Kayserispor 2; Bursaspor 1 Sivasspor 1; Besiktas 1 Trabzonspor 1.
Feb 20: Gaziantepspor 0 Besiktas 3.
Feb 21: Istanbul BB 1 Ankaragucu 2; Konyaspor 2 Antalyaspor 0; Trabzonspor 0 Denizlispor 2; Genclerbirligi 1 Fenerbahce 0; Kayserispor 0 Bursaspor 0.
Feb 22: Hacettepe 3 Ankaraspor 1; Sivasspor 1 Eskisehirspor 0; Galatasaray 2 Kocaelispor 5.
Feb 27: Besiktas 2 Istanbul BB 1.
Feb 28: Ankaraspor 0 Genclerbirligi 0; Denizlispor 2 Gaziantepspor 0; Eskisehirspor 1 Kayserispor 0; Fenerbahce 4 Sivasspor 2.
Mar 1: Ankaragucu 1 Hacettepe 0; Antalyaspor 0 Trabzonspor 1; Bursaspor 1 Kocaelispor 1; Konyaspor 0 Galatasaray 1.

TURKEY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sivasspor	22	13	6	3	36	17	45
Trabzonspor	22	13	6	3	30	18	45
Besiktas	22	12	6	4	35	20	42
Fenerbahce	22	12	4	6	43	24	40
Galatasaray	22	12	4	6	44	28	40
Ankaraspor	22	10	4	8	29	21	34
Kayserispor	22	8	9	5	21	13	33
Bursaspor	22	8	8	6	27	27	32
Gaziantepspor	22	8	6	8	28	31	30
Eskisehirspor	22	6	9	7	29	29	27
Genclerbirligi	22	6	7	9	25	28	25
Istanbul BB	22	7	4	11	24	34	25
Denizlispor	22	7	3	12	29	37	24
Ankaragucu	22	6	6	10	22	31	24
Konyaspor	22	6	6	10	21	30	24
Antalyaspor	22	5	7	10	20	29	22
Kocaelispor	22	4	4	14	30	49	16
Hacettepe	22	3	5	14	14	41	14

UKRAINE

Feb 27: Metalurh Donetsk 1 Kryvbas 1.
Feb 28: Metalurh Zaporizhya 2 Zorya 1; Dnipro 1 Lviv 1; Vorskla 1 Tavriya 0.
Mar 1: Karpaty 3 Chornomorets 0; Arsenal 1 Kharkiv 0.

UKRAINE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamo	17	14	1	2	42	11	43
Metalist	17	11	4	2	29	12	37
Vorskla	18	10	6	2	20	10	36
Metalurh D	18	10	4	4	24	13	34
Shakhtar	17	8	7	2	25	12	31
Metalurh Z	18	8	6	4	19	16	30
Dnipro	18	6	7	5	16	14	25
Karpaty	18	5	7	6	19	21	22
Zorya	18	5	6	7	19	27	21
Chornomorets	18	6	2	10	18	24	20
Kryvbas	18	4	8	6	15	21	20
Arsenal	18	4	5	9	13	21	17
Tavriya	18	3	5	10	19	32	14
Lviv	18	3	4	11	12	26	13
Illichivets	17	3	3	11	16	30	12
Kharkiv	18	0	9	9	10	26	9

ECUADOR

Holders steady start

LDU Quito began their defence of the Libertadores Cup with a 3-2 victory at home to Palmeiras.

The defeat for the Brazilians ended a run of nine straight victories this year.

Deportivo Quito – whose players have been on strike over unpaid wages – only resumed training two days before their Group 5 fixture against Cruzeiro but still held the Brazilians to a 1-1 draw, Bagner Caicedo scoring an injury-time equaliser.

PERU

Scorer taken ill

Former Newcastle United midfielder Nolberto Solano was rushed to hospital after feeling unwell following Universitario's 1-0 win over San Lorenzo in the Libertadores Cup.

Solano, who scored the only goal of the game, was later released after being treated for dehydration.

0 away Libertadores wins for Argentinian clubs this season

Surprise...Rey

VENEZUELA

Argentinian upset

Caracas provided one of the shocks of this season's tournament so far by beating Lanus of Argentina in their Libertadores Cup Group 6.

Goals from Jose Manuel Rey, Dario Figueroa and Rafael Castellin gave the home side their first points in the competition. Lanus are bottom of the group.

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Group 1

Feb 17
LDU Quito (Ecu) 3 (W R Calderon 23, 34, Manso 58)
Palmeiras (Bra) 2 (Willians 28, Edmilson 46)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)
Sent off: Armero (Palmeiras) 90min

Feb 18
Colo Colo (Chl) 1 (Barrios 70)
Sport Recife (Bra) 2 (Ciro 7, Wilson 44)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 23,427. **Ref:** Laverni (Arg)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
LDU Quito	1	1	0	0	3	2	3
Sport Recife	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Palmeiras	1	0	0	1	2	3	0
Colo Colo	1	0	0	1	1	2	0

Feb 17 LDU Quito-Palmeiras 3-2
Feb 18 Colo Colo-Sport Recife 1-2
Mar 3 Palmeiras-Colo Colo
Mar 4 Sport Recife-LDU Quito
Mar 12 Colo Colo-LDU Quito
Apr 8 Sport Recife-Palmeiras
Apr 9 LDU Quito-Colo Colo
Apr 15 Palmeiras-Sport Recife
Apr 21 Palmeiras-LDU Quito
Apr 22 Sport Recife-Colo Colo
Apr 29 Colo Colo-Palmeiras
Apr 29 LDU Quito-Sport Recife

Group 2

Feb 10
Guarani (Par) 1 (Chavez 37)
Deportivo Tachira (Ven) 2 (Chacon 40, Perez Grego 79)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Abal (Arg)

Feb 17
Boca Juniors (Arg) 1 (Palacio 12)
Deportivo Cuenca (Ecu) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** De Oliveira (Bra)

Feb 24
Deportivo Cuenca 4 (Teixeira Pereira 45, Granda 61, Villalba 74, Cordero 82)
Guarani 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Soto (Ven)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dep Cuenca	2	1	0	1	4	1	3
Dep Tachira	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Boca Juniors	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Guarani	2	0	0	2	1	6	0

Feb 10 Guarani-Dep Tachira 1-2
Feb 17 Boca Juniors-Dep Cuenca 1-0
Feb 24 Dep Cuenca-Guarani 4-0
Mar 4 Dep Tachira-Boca Juniors
Mar 11 Dep Tachira-Dep Cuenca
Mar 17 Dep Cuenca-Dep Tachira
Mar 18 Guarani-Boca Juniors
Apr 9 Boca Juniors-Guarani
Apr 16 Dep Tachira-Guarani
Apr 22 Dep Cuenca-Boca Juniors
Apr 30 Boca Juniors-Dep Tachira
Apr 30 Guarani-Dep Cuenca

Group 3

Feb 12
Nacional (Uru) 2 (Dominguez 30, Lodeiro 90)
Universidad SMP (Per) 1 (Arzuaga 39)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 11,518. **Ref:** Chandia (Chl)

Feb 12
River Plate (Arg) 1 (Buonanotte 90)
Nacional (Par) 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 17,673. **Ref:** Lopes (Bra)
Sent off: Flores (River) 90min; Nunez (Nacional) 90min+

Feb 18
Nacional (Par) 0
Nacional (Uru) 3 (Fernandez 9, Lodeiro 38, Mondiani 64)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 1,307. **Ref:** Gaciba (Bra)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nacional (U)	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
River Plate	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Univ SMP	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Nacional (P)	2	0	0	2	0	4	0

Feb 12 Nacional (U)-Univ SMP 2-1
Feb 12 River Plate-Nacional (P) 1-0
Feb 18 Nacional (P)-Nacional (U) 0-3
Mar 5 Univ SMP-River Plate
Mar 12 Univ SMP-Nacional (P)
Mar 19 Nacional (U)-River Plate
Apr 7 Nacional (P)-Univ SMP
Apr 7 River Plate-Nacional (U)
Apr 21 Univ SMP-Nacional (U)
Apr 23 Nacional (P)-River Plate
Apr 30 Nacional (U)-Nacional (P)
Apr 30 River Plate-Univ SMP

Group 4

Feb 10
Defensor Sporting (Uru) 1 (Gaglianone 38)
America (Col) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 12,734. **Ref:** Osses (Chl)

Feb 18
Sao Paulo (Bra) 1 (Borges 90)
Independiente Medellin (Col) 1 (Arias 79)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 30,375. **Ref:** Pezzota (Arg)

Feb 24
Independiente Medellin 0
Defensor Sporting 0
Ref: Vera (Ecu)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Defensor	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Ind Medellin	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Sao Paulo	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
America	1	0	0	1	0	1	0

Feb 10 Defensor-America 1-0
Feb 18 Sao Paulo-Indep Medellin 1-1
Feb 24 Indep Medellin-Defensor 0-0
Mar 5 America-Sao Paulo
Mar 10 America-Indep Medellin
Mar 17 Indep Medellin-America
Mar 18 Defensor-Sao Paulo
Apr 9 Sao Paulo-Defensor
Apr 15 Indep Medellin-Sao Paulo
Apr 16 America-Defensor
Apr 22 Defensor-Indep Medellin
Apr 22 Sao Paulo-America

Group 5

Feb 12
Universitario (Bol) 1 (Gomes 51)
Deportivo Quito (Ecu) 1 (Donoso 68)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Garay (Per)

Feb 19
Cruzeiro (Bra) 3 (Fernandinho pen 63, Kleber 69, 72)
Estudiantes (Arg) 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 33,969. **Ref:** Amarilla (Par)
Sent off: Kleber (Cruzeiro) 75min

Feb 25
Deportivo Quito 1 (Caicedo 90)
Cruzeiro 1 (Ramires 38)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Buckley (Per)
Sent off: Wellington Paulista 42min, Fabricio 65min (both Cruzeiro); Checa (Dep Quito) 52min

Feb 26
Estudiantes 1 (Salgueiro 16)
Universitario 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Pozo (Chl)
Sent off: Aguirre (Universitario) 78min

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cruzeiro	2	1	1	0	4	1	4
Estudiantes	2	1	0	1	1	3	3
Dep Quito	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Universitario	2	0	1	1	1	2	1

Feb 12 Universitario-Dep Quito 1-1
Feb 19 Cruzeiro-Estudiantes 3-0
Feb 25 Dep Quito-Cruzeiro 1-1
Feb 26 Estudiantes-Universitario 1-0
Mar 4 Universitario-Cruzeiro
Mar 10 Dep Quito-Estudiantes
Mar 18 Cruzeiro-Universitario
Mar 19 Estudiantes-Dep Quito
Apr 8 Estudiantes-Cruzeiro
Apr 14 Dep Quito-Universitario
Apr 22 Cruzeiro-Dep Quito
Apr 22 Universitario-Estudiantes

Group 6

Feb 11
Lanus (Arg) 1 (Sand 90)
Guadalajara (Mex) 1 (Avila 33)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 4,885. **Ref:** Silvera (Uru)

Feb 17
Everton (Chl) 1 (Gutierrez 45)
Caracas (Ven) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 12,200. **Ref:** Arias (Par)

Feb 25
Caracas 3 (Rey 47, Figueroa 49, Castellin 71)
Lanus 1 (Sand 84)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 6,533. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)

Feb 25
Guadalajara 6 (Ponce 18, Morales pen 23, Medina 32, Fabian 37, J Hernandez 78, 87)
Everton 2 (Gutierrez 50, Miralles pen 53)
HT: 4-0. **Ref:** Laverni (Arg)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guadalajara	2	1	1	0	7	3	4
Caracas	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Everton	2	1	0	1	3	6	3
Lanus	2	0	1	1	2	4	1

Feb 11 Lanus-Guadalajara 1-1
Feb 17 Everton-Caracas 1-0
Feb 25 Caracas-Lanus 3-1
Feb 25 Guadalajara-Everton 6-2
Mar 3 Caracas-Guadalajara
Mar 11 Everton-Lanus
Mar 11 Guadalajara-Caracas
Mar 17 Lanus-Everton
Apr 14 Caracas-Everton
Apr 14 Guadalajara-Lanus
Apr 29 Everton-Guadalajara
Apr 29 Lanus-Caracas

Group 7

Feb 10
Aurora (Bol) 0
Chico (Col) 3 (Tapia 45, 79, Mahecha 90)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Carrillo (Per)
Sent off: Huayhuata (Aurora) 82min

Feb 25
Gremio (Bra) 0
Universidad de Chile (Chl) 0
Att: 33,431. **Ref:** Vazquez (Uru)
Sent off: Diaz (Univ de Chile) 71min

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 7

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Chico	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Gremio	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Univ de Chile	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Aurora	1	0	0	1	0	3	0

Feb 10 Aurora-Chico 0-3
Feb 25 Gremio-Univ de Chile 0-0
Mar 4 Univ de Chile-Aurora
Mar 11 Chico-Gremio
Mar 18 Chico-Univ de Chile
Mar 25 Aurora-Gremio
Apr 7 Gremio-Aurora
Apr 8 Univ de Chile-Chico
Apr 15 Univ de Chile-Gremio
Apr 16 Chico-Aurora
Apr 28 Aurora-Univ de Chile
Apr 28 Gremio-Chico

Group 8

Feb 11
Libertad (Par) 2 (Maciel 42, Roman 83)
Universitario (Per) 1 (Solano 63)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Beligoy (Arg)

Feb 11
San Lorenzo (Arg) 4 (Silvera 3, 16, Bergessio 31, Barrientos 48)
San Luis (Mex) 1 (Lojero 70)
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Gaciba (Bra)

Feb 19
Universitario 1 (Solano pen 21)
San Lorenzo 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Fagundes (Bra)
Sent off: Bottinelli (San Lorenzo) 20min

Feb 26
San Luis 0
Libertad 1 (Ramirez 15)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Baldassi (Arg)
Sent off: Caceres (Libertad) 75min

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Libertad	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
San Lorenzo	2	1	0	1	4	2	3
Universitario	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
San Luis	2	0	0	2	1	5	0

Feb 11 Libertad-Universitario 2-1
Feb 11 San Lorenzo-San Luis 4-1
Feb 19 Universitario-San Lorenzo 1-0
Feb 26 San Luis-Libertad 0-1

Off...Ischia

16 years, 7 months and 2 days: Daniel Villalba plays against Colon Santa Fe and becomes River Plate's youngest ever player

ARGENTINA

Bosses dismissed

Coaches Luis Zubeldia of Lanus and Carlos Ischia of Boca Juniors were both sent off in the final 10 minutes as the title holders were beaten 1-0 at Lanus.

BRAZIL

Seven see red in state game

Seven players were sent off after a goal celebration sparked a mass brawl during a state championship game.

Trouble erupted after Ulbra scored their fifth and final goal in a 5-2 away win against Brasil in the Rio Grande do Sul championship.

There were further red cards in the big Sao Paulo state championship clash between Sao Paulo and Corinthians, which

Young star...Villalba (right)

Mar 5	Libertad-San Lorenzo
Mar 10	Universitario-San Luis
Mar 18	San Lorenzo-Libertad
Mar 18	San Luis-Universitario
Apr 7	Universitario-Libertad
Apr 8	San Luis-San Lorenzo
Apr 28	Libertad-San Luis
Apr 28	San Lorenzo-Universitario

Top two in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

ARGENTINA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Friday, February 6

Huracan 1 (Bolatti 87)
San Martin Tucuman 0

Tigre 1 (Silvera og 79)
San Lorenzo 3 (Paparatto og 39, Santana 78, Silvera 90)

Saturday, February 7

Argentinos Juniors 0
Arsenal 2 (Leguizamon pen 4, Yacuzzi 90)

Estudiantes 0
Rosario Central 0

Godoy Cruz 1 (Sigali 12)
Banfield 1 (Silva 22)

Lanus 3 (Sand pen 8, 60, Blanco 23)
Racing Club 1 (Luguercio 2)

Newell's Old Boys 3 (Formica 52, 67, Armani 59)
Gimnasia La Plata 0

Sunday, February 8

Gimnasia Jujuy 1 (Calandria 90)
Boca Juniors 2 (Noir 72, Viatri 83)

Independiente 0
Velez Sarsfield 0

River Plate 2 (Cabral 57, Falcao Garcia 68)
Colon Santa Fe 2 (Capurro 77, Prediger 90)

Friday, February 13

Colon Santa Fe 1 (Oyola 61)
Gimnasia Jujuy 0

Racing Club 1 (Martinez 11)
Huracan 4 (De Federico 15, 29, Nieto 26, Pastore 32)

Saturday, February 14

Arsenal 2 (Leguizamon 32, 49)
Tigre 0

Banfield 1 (Bertolo 9)
Estudiantes 0

Boca Juniors 0
Newell's Old Boys 2 (Armani 61, Sperdutti 72)

Velez Sarsfield 1 (Nanni 90)
Argentinos Juniors 1 (Ortigoza pen 33)

Sunday, February 15

Gimnasia La Plata 3 (Rinaudo 5, Romero 29, Maldonado 78)
Lanus 2 (Sand 2, Viera 35)

Rosario Central 1 (Caraglio 15)
River Plate 2 (Galmarini 63, Fabbiani 67)

San Lorenzo 1 (Carranza og 2)
Godoy Cruz 2 (Borghello 53, Caruso 81)

San Martin Tucuman 3 (Canio 46, 63, 87)
Independiente 0

Friday, February 20

Huracan 0
Gimnasia La Plata 2 (Villar 11, Niell 17)

Newell's Old Boys 1 (Salcedo 76)
Gimnasia Jujuy 1 (Arraya 70)

Saturday, February 21

Colon Santa Fe 2 (Fuertes 11, 86)
Rosario Central 0

Godoy Cruz 1 (Caruso 4)
Arsenal 0

Independiente 2 (Pusineri 3, Montenegro pen 65)
Racing Club 0

Tigre 1 (Ayala 34)
Velez Sarsfield 2 (Lopez pen 45, Larrivey 53)

Sunday, February 22

Argentinos Juniors 2 (Ojeda 59, Canuto 74)
San Martin Tucuman 2 (Herrera 69, Ibanez 90)

Estudiantes 2 (Cellay 35, Boselli 40)
San Lorenzo 1 (Bergessio 81)

Lanus 1 (Salvio 3)
Boca Juniors 0

River Plate 2 (Abelairas 37, Falcao Garcia 83)
Banfield 0

Friday, February 27

Banfield 3 (Braghieri og 43, Bertolo 45, Rodriguez 75)
Rosario Central 1 (Burdisso 90)

Gimnasia La Plata 2 (Maldonado 25, Romero 67)
Independiente 0

Saturday, February 28

Newell's Old Boys 1 (Quiroga 7)
Colon Santa Fe 1 (Rivarola 80)

Racing Club 1 (Lucero 51)
Argentinos Juniors 1 (Pavlovich 90)

San Martin Tucuman 2 (Perugini 21, Quinteros 90)
Tigre 2 (Luna 30, 55)

Velez Sarsfield 4 (Lopez 54, Moralez 55, 65, Larrivey 77)
Godoy Cruz 0

Sunday, March 1

Arsenal 3 (Mosquera 2, Leguizamon 23, Yacuzzi 35)
Estudiantes 1 (Perez 63)

Boca Juniors 3 (Palermo 69, Figueroa 82, 88)
Huracan 1 (Dominguez 86)

Gimnasia Jujuy 0
Lanus 2 (Biglieri 38, Salvio 88)

San Lorenzo 5 (Santana 1, Gonzalez 5, Bottinelli 18, Bergessio 45, Silvera 58)
River Plate 1 (Buonanotte 24)

ARGENTINA – CLOSING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arsenal	4	3	0	1	7	2	9
Lanus	4	3	0	1	8	4	9
Gimnasia LP	4	3	0	1	7	5	9
Newell's	4	2	2	0	7	2	8
Velez	4	2	2	0	7	2	8
Colon	4	2	2	0	6	3	8
Banfield	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
River Plate	4	2	1	1	7	8	7
Godoy Cruz	4	2	1	1	4	6	7
San Lorenzo	4	2	0	2	10	6	6
Huracan	4	2	0	2	6	6	6
Boca Juniors	4	2	0	2	5	5	6
San Martin T	4	1	2	1	7	5	5
Estudiantes	4	1	1	2	3	5	4
Independiente	4	1	1	2	2	5	4
Argentinos Jrs	4	0	3	1	4	6	3
Gimnasia J	4	0	1	3	2	6	1
Tigre	4	0	1	3	4	9	1
Rosario	4	0	1	3	2	7	1
Racing Club	4	0	1	3	3	10	1

LEADING GOALSCORERS

4	Luciano Leguizamon (Arsenal)
3	Cristian Canio (San Martin Tucuman)
3	Jose Sand (Lanus)

BOLIVIA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 7: Aurora 1 La Paz 1.
Feb 8: Universitario 3 The Strongest 0; Nacional 2 Blooming 0; Bolivar 2 San Jose 1; Jorge Wilstermann 2 Real Mamore 0; Oriente 2 Real Potosi 3.
Feb 14: The Strongest 0 Nacional 1.
Feb 15: Real Potosi 2 San Jose 1; Bolivar 0 Universitario 1; Real Mamore 1 Oriente 1; Aurora 3 Jorge Wilstermann 0; Blooming 3 La Paz 5.
Feb 28: Bolivar 2 Real Potosi 3; Aurora 1 Oriente 1.
Mar 1: San Jose 4 Real Mamore 2; La Paz 0 The Strongest 3; Nacional 2 Universitario 1; Jorge Wilstermann 0 Blooming 0.

BOLIVIA – OPENING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nacional	3	3	0	0	5	1	9
Real Potosi	3	3	0	0	8	5	9
Universitario	3	2	0	1	5	2	6
Aurora	3	1	2	0	5	2	5
La Paz	3	1	1	1	6	7	4
J Wilstermann	3	1	1	1	2	3	4
San Jose	3	1	0	2	6	6	3
Bolivar	3	1	0	2	4	5	3
The Strongest	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Oriente	3	0	2	1	4	5	2
Blooming	3	0	1	2	3	7	1
Real Mamore	3	0	1	2	3	7	1

CHILE

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 6: Dep La Serena 0 Colo Colo 3.
Feb 7: Audax Italiano 1 Santiago Morning 1; Palestino 1 O'Higgins 2; Univ de Concepcion 0 Everton 0; Univ Catolica 1 Cobresal 1.
Feb 8: Cobreloa 3 Nublense 0; Municipal Iquique 1 Curico Unido 0; Union Espanola 4 Huachipato 0.
Feb 13: Everton 1 Municipal Iquique 0.
Feb 14: Palestino 0 Audax Italiano 2; Nublense 2 Santiago Morning 1; Dep La Serena 1 Univ Catolica 2; Colo Colo 2 Univ de Concepcion 0.
Feb 15: Cobresal 1 Union Espanola 3; O'Higgins 1 Rangers 0; Huachipato 0 Curico Unido 0; Univ de Chile 4 Cobreloa 1.
Feb 18: Rangers 0 Univ de Chile 4.
Feb 21: Santiago Morning 5 Huachipato 0; Union Espanola 0 Univ de Chile 1; Everton 3 Rangers 2; Univ de Concepcion 2 O'Higgins 0.
Feb 22: Cobresal 1 Cobreloa 4; Municipal Iquique 3 Palestino 0; Curico Unido 1 Dep La Serena 1; Univ Catolica 1 Nublense 0; Audax Italiano 2 Colo Colo 1.
Feb 25: Cobreloa 4 Palestino 0; O'Higgins 3 Univ Catolica 1; Union Espanola 2 Municipal Iquique 0; Rangers 1 Cobresal 2; Colo Colo 4 Santiago Morning 2; Dep La Serena 3 Huachipato 1.
Feb 26: Univ de Concepcion 3 Audax Italiano 1.
Feb 28: Rangers 2 Colo Colo 1; Nublense 1 Cobresal 1; Univ de Chile 0 Municipal Iquique 0.
Mar 1: Huachipato 2 Univ Catolica 0; Cobreloa 1 Dep La Serena 1; Santiago Morning 5 Univ de Concepcion 4; O'Higgins 0 Everton 1; Palestino 0 Curico Unido 4; Audax Italiano 2 Union Espanola 2.

CHILE – OPENING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
U Espanola	6	4	1	1	12	4	13
Univ de Chile	4	3	1	0	9	1	10
S Morning	6	3	1	2	16	11	10
Cobreloa	6	3	1	2	13	8	10
Colo Colo	6	3	1	2	13	8	10
U Concepcion	6	3	1	2	10	8	10
Univ Catolica	6	3	1	2	9	7	10
Everton	5	3	1	1	5	3	10
O'Higgins	6	3	1	2	7	6	10
Audax Italiano	6	2	2	2	9	9	8
Nublense	5	2	1	2	5	7	7
Municipal	6	2	1	3	4	7	7
Curico Unido	5	1	3	1	7	4	6
Dep La Serena	6	1	3	2	7	9	6
Cobresal	6	1	3	2	7	11	6
Rangers	6	1	1	4	6	12	4
Huachipato	6	1	1	4	3	13	4
Palestino	5	0	0	5	1	15	0

COLOMBIA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 6: America 2 Cucuta 1.
Feb 7: At Junior 2 Millonarios 1; At Huila 0 Chico 1.
Feb 8: Quindio 1 Tolima 1; La Equidad 1 Nacional 0; Pereira 0 Once Caldas 1; Indep Medellin 1 Dep Pasto 1; Envigado 3 Dep Cali 3; Indep Santa Fe 1 Real Cartagena 0.
Feb 13: Once Caldas 2 La Equidad 3.
Feb 14: Dep Cali 3 Indep Medellin 1; Chico 1 Indep Santa Fe 0.
Feb 15: Real Cartagena 2 Envigado 1; Dep Pasto 0 Pereira 0; Cucuta 0 At Junior 0; Millonarios 1 Quindio 1; Tolima 0 At Huila 1; Nacional 0 America 2.
Feb 18: La Equidad 1 Dep Pasto 3; Tolima 3 Millonarios 1; Quindio 0 Cucuta 1; At Junior 3 Nacional 0; America 1 Once Caldas 1; Envigado 1 Chico 1; Indep Santa Fe 3 At Huila 1.
Feb 19: Indep Medellin 1 Real Cartagena 1; Pereira 1 Dep Cali 0.
Feb 21: Once Caldas 1 At Junior 1; Indep Santa Fe 1 Envigado 1; At Huila 2 Millonarios 1.
Feb 22: Cucuta 2 Tolima 0; Nacional 0 Quindio 1; Dep Pasto 1 America 0; Real Cartagena 3 Pereira 1; Chico 3 Indep Medellin 2; Dep Cali 2 La Equidad 3.
Feb 27: Quindio 2 Once Caldas 1.
Feb 28: Indep Medellin 2 Indep Santa Fe 2; Millonarios 1 Cucuta 0.
Mar 1: Envigado 2 At Huila 0; Pereira 4 Chico 0; La Equidad 0 Real Cartagena 0; America 0 Dep Cali 1; At Junior 2 Dep Pasto 0; Tolima 2 Nacional 1.

finished 1-1. Corinthians' Tulio and Wagner Diniz of Sao Paulo received their marching orders in a game that also saw 11 yellow cards.

ECUADOR

Local rivals all at sea

It was honours even in the country's biggest game, the "shipyard derby" between Emelec and Barcelona.

However, the 0-0 draw in Guayaquil does few favours for either side. The pair are both in the bottom three and remain the only teams in the league without a win.

URUGUAY

Paying the price

The closing championship started with only 15 teams following the expulsion of Villa Espanola.

The club were relegated for failing to pay money owed to former players.

CANADA

Making an Impact

Montreal Impact drew a record crowd of 55,571 to the Olympic Stadium for their CONCACAF Champions League quarter-final first leg against Santos Laguna.

They won with two goals from Eduardo Sebrango.

HONDURAS

Team-mates banned

Six players have been temporarily suspended by the Honduran football federation.

Real Juventud players Carlos Navarro, Dionisio Meija, Jose Medina, Jorge Funez, Luis Castro and Ronaldo Maradiaga were all found guilty of using banned substances following their side's 0-0 draw against Vida.

Double...Sebrango

COLOMBIA – OPENING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
At Junior	5	3	2	0	8	2	11
La Equidad	5	3	1	1	8	7	10
Chico	5	3	1	1	6	7	10
Ind Santa Fe	5	2	2	1	7	5	8
Cartagena	5	2	2	1	6	4	8
Dep Pasto	5	2	2	1	5	4	8
Quindio	5	2	2	1	5	4	8
Pereira	5	2	1	2	6	4	7
Dep Cali	5	2	1	2	9	8	7
America	5	2	1	2	5	4	7
Cucuta	5	2	1	2	4	3	7
Tolima	5	2	1	2	6	6	7
At Huila	5	2	0	3	4	7	6
Envigado	5	1	3	1	8	7	6
Once Caldas	5	1	2	2	6	7	5
Millonarios	5	1	1	3	5	8	4
Ind Medellin	5	0	3	2	7	10	3
Nacional	5	0	0	5	1	9	0

ECUADOR

1ST STAGE

Feb 6: Barcelona 0 Dep Quito 0; LDU Portoviejo 2 LDU Quito 1.
Feb 7: Dep Cuenca 0 Macara 1; Tecnico Univ 1 Espoli 3.
Feb 8: El Nacional 2 Emelec 1; Olmedo 2 Manta 0.
Feb 11: Espoli 1 Dep Cuenca 0.
Feb 13: LDU Quito 2 Manta 1.
Feb 15: Macara 2 Tecnico Univ 1; Espoli 2 Barcelona 1; LDU Portoviejo 0 El Nacional 1; Dep Quito 2 Olmedo 1.
Feb 20: Barcelona 0 Macara 0.
Feb 21: Dep Cuenca 3 LDU Portoviejo 0; El Nacional 1 LDU Quito 1; Manta 1 Dep Quito 0; Tecnico Univ 2 Emelec 1; Olmedo 0 Espoli 1.
Feb 27: LDU Portoviejo 1 Tecnico Univ 0.
Feb 28: LDU Quito 4 Dep Quito 0; Espoli 0 Manta 0.
Mar 1: Emelec 0 Barcelona 0; Macara 1 Olmedo 3; El Nacional 2 Dep Cuenca 3.

ECUADOR – 1ST STAGE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Espoli	5	4	1	0	7	2	13
Macara	5	3	1	1	5	4	10
LDU P'viejo	5	3	0	2	4	5	9
LDU Quito	5	2	2	1	9	5	8
Olmedo	5	2	1	2	7	5	7
El Nacional	5	2	1	2	6	6	7
Dep Cuenca	4	2	0	2	6	4	6
Manta	5	1	2	2	2	4	5
Dep Quito	5	1	2	2	3	7	5
Barcelona	5	0	4	1	1	2	4
Tecnico Univ	5	1	1	3	5	8	4
Emelec	4	0	1	3	2	5	1

PARAGUAY

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 14: Libertad 8 3 de Febrero 0; Guarani 1 Sol de America 1.
Feb 15: 12 de Octubre 0 Tacuary 1; Nacional 0 Cerro Porteno 2; Sportivo Luqueno 1 Rubio Nu 0.
Feb 20: Rubio Nu 0 Guarani 1.
Feb 21: Libertad 1 Olimpia 2; Tacuary 0 Nacional 1.
Feb 22: 3 de Febrero 0 12 de Octubre 2; Cerro Porteno 1 Sportivo Luqueno 0; Sol de America 1 2 de Mayo 0.
Feb 27: 2 de Mayo 1 Rubio Nu 2; Olimpia 1 Sol de America 1.
Feb 28: Sportivo Luqueno 2 Tacuary 2; Nacional 3 3 de Febrero 2.
Mar 1: Guarani 0 Cerro Porteno 1; 12 de Octubre 1 Libertad 2.

PARAGUAY – OPENING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cerro Porteno	3	3	0	0	4	0	9
Libertad	3	2	0	1	11	3	6
Nacional	3	2	0	1	4	4	6
Sol America	3	1	2	0	3	2	5
Olimpia	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
S Luqueno	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Tacuary	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Guarani	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
12 de Octubre	3	1	0	2	3	3	3
Rubio Nu	3	1	0	2	2	3	3
2 de Mayo	2	0	0	2	1	3	0
3 de Febrero	3	0	0	3	2	13	0

PERU

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 14: Ayacucho 1 Coronel Bolognesi 1; Iquitos 0 Sporting Cristal 0; Total Chalaco 0 Juan Aurich 0.
Feb 15: Alianza Atletico 1 Universitario 2; Sport Ancash 1 Jose Galvez 2; Cienciano 2 Melgar 1; Universidad SMP 1 Cesar Vallejo 1; Alianza Lima 2 Huancayo 1.
Feb 21: Juan Aurich 1 Ayacucho 0; Melgar 1 Total Chalaco 0; Coronel Bolognesi 1 Alianza Lima 2.
Feb 22: Huancayo 1 Universidad SMP 1; Sporting Cristal 5 Alianza Atletico 0; Jose Galvez 1 Cienciano 1; Cesar Vallejo 1 Iquitos 1; Universitario 5 Sport Ancash 1.
Feb 28: Alianza Atletico 1 Cesar Vallejo 2; Alianza Lima 1 Juan Aurich 1; Universidad SMP 3 Coronel Bolognesi 1.
Mar 1: Cienciano 1 Universitario 1; Sport Ancash 0 Sporting Cristal 5; Total Chalaco 4 Jose Galvez 0; Iquitos 2 Huancayo 0; Ayacucho 1 Melgar 1.

PERU – OPENING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
S Cristal	3	2	1	0	10	0	7
Universitario	3	2	1	0	8	3	7
Al Lima	3	2	1	0	5	3	7
Univ SMP	3	1	2	0	5	3	5
Iquitos	3	1	2	0	3	1	5
Cesar Vallejo	3	1	2	0	4	3	5
Cienciano	3	1	2	0	4	3	5
Juan Aurich	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
Total Chalaco	3	1	1	1	4	1	4
Melgar	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Jose Galvez	3	1	1	1	3	6	4
Ayacucho	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
C Bolognesi	3	0	1	2	3	6	1
Huancayo	3	0	1	2	2	5	1
Al Atletico	3	0	0	3	2	9	0
Sport Ancash	3	0	0	3	2	12	0

URUGUAY

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 7: Defensor 1 Juventud 0; Danubio 2 Penarol 1; Racing 0 Wanderers 2; Central Espanol 1 Nacional 2.
Feb 8: Liverpool 2 River Plate 1; Rampla Juniors 2 Cerro Largo 2; Tacuarembo 3 Villa Espanola 0; Bella Vista 1 Cerro 0.

URUGUAY – OPENING – FINAL*	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Danubio*	15	10	2	3	27	15	32
Nacional*	15	10	2	3	23	13	32
Defensor	15	9	3	3	23	12	30
Racing	15	7	6	2	24	14	27
Liverpool	15	7	6	2	21	15	27
Penarol**	15	8	4	3	29	15	25
Cerro	15	6	5	4	20	12	23
River Plate	15	5	5	5	17	17	20
C Espanol	15	5	5	5	17	21	20
Tacuarembo	15	5	2	8	15	20	17
Bella Vista	15	5	2	8	13	22	17
Wanderers	15	4	2	9	17	18	14
Rampla Jrs	15	3	5	7	16	24	14
Villa Espanola+	15	3	3	9	11	26	12
Cerro Largo	15	1	6	8	13	25	9
Juventud	15	2	2	11	9	26	8

**Danubio and Nacional went into championship decider after finishing level on points*
***3pts deducted for incidents during game in previous opening championship*
+Villa Espanola relegated because of financial problems

Opening championship decider

Feb 15
Danubio 1 (S Rodriguez 36)
Nacional 2 (Fernandez 60, Garcia 77)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Larrionda
Sent off: Romero (Nacional) 51min; Amarilla (Danubio) 89min

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 21: Penarol 1 Wanderers 0; Cerro 0 Defensor 1.
Feb 22: River Plate 2 Racing 2; Nacional 2 Juventud 2; Bella Vista 2 Tacuarembo 3; Central Espanol 2 Rampla Juniors 2; Danubio 1 Cerro Largo 1.
Feb 28: Cerro Largo 2 Central Espanol 0; Wanderers 4 Danubio 2; Tacuarembo 0 Cerro 5; Juventud 3 Liverpool 1.
Mar 1: Defensor 3 Bella Vista 0; Rampla Juniors 2 River Plate 1.

URUGUAY – CLOSING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Defensor	2	2	0	0	4	0	6
Juventud	2	1	1	0	5	3	4
Cerro Largo	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Rampla Jrs	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Cerro	2	1	0	1	5	1	3
Wanderers	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
Penarol	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Tacuarembo	2	1	0	1	3	7	3
Nacional	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Racing	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
River Plate	2	0	1	1	3	4	1
Danubio	2	0	1	1	3	5	1
C Espanol	2	0	1	1	2	4	1
Liverpool	1	0	0	1	1	3	0
Bella Vista	2	0	0	2	2	6	0

VENEZUELA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 7: Estrella Roja 0 Zamora 0.
Feb 8: Carabobo 1 El Vigia 1; Zulia 4 Aragua 2; Minerven 0 UA Maracaibo 1; Caracas 0 Mineros 0; Estudiantes 0 Guaros 1; Llaneros 1 Dep Italia 1.
Feb 9: Anzoategui 4 Portuguesa 0.
Feb 12: Aragua 1 Caracas 2.
Feb 19: Carabobo 0 UA Maracaibo 3; Zamora 3 El Vigia 1; Estrella Roja 1 Monagas 1; Estudiantes 3 Minerven 0; Mineros 3 Aragua 1; Dep Tachira 1 Dep Italia 0; Zulia 1 Guaros 0; Anzoategui 0 Llaneros 0.
Feb 21: Caracas 2 Portuguesa 1.
Feb 25: Mineros 1 Dep Tachira 5.
Feb 28: Minerven 0 Dep Tachira 1; Estudiantes 2 Anzoategui 1.
Mar 1: Dep Italia 2 Carabobo 0; Monagas 3 Zamora 2; Aragua 2 El Vigia 0; Portuguesa 1 Mineros 1; Llaneros 1 Zulia 1; UA Maracaibo 1 Estrella Roja 1.

VENEZUELA – CLOSING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Caracas	8	6	1	1	16	8	19
Dep Tachira	7	4	2	1	10	4	14
Mineros	7	3	3	1	10	9	12
Zulia	6	3	2	1	10	6	11
UA Maracaibo	6	3	2	1	8	4	11
Estudiantes	6	3	1	2	9	5	10
Guaros	6	3	1	2	4	5	10
Zamora	6	2	3	1	11	7	9
Dep Italia	6	2	3	1	9	6	9
Llaneros	7	2	3	2	6	7	9
Estrella Roja	6	1	4	1	7	7	7
El Vigia	6	1	3	2	6	9	6
Monagas	6	1	2	3	4	9	5
Portuguesa	6	1	2	3	4	9	5
Anzoategui	5	1	1	3	6	7	4
Minerven	6	0	3	3	4	9	3
Aragua	6	1	0	5	7	13	3
Carabobo	6	0	2	4	4	13	2

CENTRAL & NORTH AMERICA

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals

1st legs - February 24-26
Cruz Azul (Mex) 1 Pumas UNAM (Mex) 0
Houston Dynamo (USA) 1 Atlante (Mex) 1
Montreal Impact (Can) 2 Santos Laguna (Mex) 0
Puerto Rico Islanders (PR) 2 Marathon (Hnd) 1

2nd legs - March 3-5

HONDURAS

HONDURAS	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olimpia	9	5	3	1	9	4	18
Espana	9	4	4	1	11	3	16
Marathon	8	4	3	1	16	6	15
Victoria	9	3	3	3	10	9	12
Platense	9	3	3	3	13	14	12
Motagua	9	2	4	3	6	7	10
Juventud	9	2	4	3	5	8	10
Vida	8	2	3	3	7	10	9
Savio	9	1	4	4	4	11	7
Hispano	9	2	1	6	11	20	7

MEXICO

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 6: Tecos UAG 2 Monterrey 3.
Feb 7: San Luis 2 Atlas 1; Cruz Azul 1 Tigres 1; Guadalajara 1 Necaxa 1; Atlante 0 Jaguares 2.
Feb 8: Indios 0 Santos 0; Pumas UNAM 0 Morelia 1; Puebla 0 Toluca 2; America 1 Pachuca 3.
Feb 14: Monterrey 3 Cruz Azul 1; Jaguares 0 America 0; Pachuca 3 Pumas UNAM 2; Morelia 1 Puebla 2; Tigres 1 San Luis 0; Atlas 1 Atlante 0; Necaxa 1 Tecos UAG 3.
Feb 15: Toluca 1 Indios 0; Santos 2 Guadalajara 1.
Feb 18: Indios 2 Morelia 0; America 2 Atlas 2; Tecos UAG 1 Santos 0; Cruz Azul 2 San Luis 2;

MEXICO

Toluca storm back

Champions Toluca were forced to come from behind twice against Monterrey to draw 3-3 and maintain their unbeaten record.

Group 1 leaders Pachuca lost the championship's only other unblemished record as they were beaten 5-0 at Group 2 leaders Guadalajara.

Five star...Guadalajara

Meanwhile, the arrival of Argentinian coach Jose Pekerman did little to lift struggling Tigres who lost 2-1 at Pumas UNAM.

EGYPT

Loss of form

Petrojet have failed to win a single game since becoming surprise league leaders in mid-February.

The team from Suez have drawn two and lost once since going top with a 3-1 home win over Al Jaish. They were held 2-2 at home by new leaders Al Ahly who have a two-point advantage over second-place Ismaili, with a game in hand.

GHANA

Four deaths

Four supporters died from suffocation during the match between Asante Kotoko and Hearts Of Oak.

Overcrowding and severe heat have been blamed.

AUSTRALIA

Costanzo joins Jets

Newcastle Jets have agreed a one-year deal with Adelaide United's international defender Angelo Costanzo ahead of their Asian Champions League campaign.

Costanzo, who has six

Monterrey 3 Necaxa 0; Atlante 1 Tigres 1; Guadalajara 1 Toluca 2; Puebla 2 Pachuca 2; Pumas UNAM 1 Jaguares 1.
Feb 21: Pachuca 3 Indios 0; San Luis 1 Atlante 1; Jaguares 2 Puebla 4; Morelia 1 Guadalajara 1; Tigres 2 America 3; Atlas 2 Pumas UNAM 0.
Feb 22: Toluca 1 Tecos UAG 1; Santos 2 Monterrey 0; Necaxa 2 Cruz Azul 4.
Feb 27: Tecos UAG 0 Morelia 0.
Feb 28: Cruz Azul 0 Atlante 0; Monterrey 3 Toluca 3; Guadalajara 5 Pachuca 0.
Mar 1: Indios 1 Jaguares 1; Necaxa 2 Santos 2; Puebla 1 Atlas 1; Pumas UNAM 2 Tigres 1; America 0 San Luis 2.

MEXICO – CLOSING – GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pachuca	8	5	2	1	18	13	17
Monterrey	8	4	2	2	18	11	14
Puebla	8	3	3	2	10	12	12
Indios	8	2	4	2	8	9	10
Santos	8	2	3	3	7	7	9
Atlante	8	1	5	2	8	9	8

GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guadalajara	8	3	3	2	15	10	12
Tecos UAG	8	3	2	3	9	8	11
Cruz Azul	8	2	4	2	15	12	10
Pumas UNAM	8	3	1	4	8	10	10
America	8	2	3	3	10	13	9
Morelia	8	2	3	3	4	7	9

GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Toluca	8	4	4	0	15	10	16
Jaguares	8	3	3	2	12	9	12
San Luis	8	3	3	2	10	8	12
Atlas	8	2	3	3	9	12	9
Tigres	8	1	3	4	8	15	6
Necaxa	8	0	3	5	9	18	3

AFRICA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round

1st legs - Jan 30-Feb 1; 2nd legs - Feb 14/15
Al Ahly Tripoli (Lby) v AS Police (Ngr)
6-0, 1-2 (agg 7-2)
Al Merreikh (Sud) v ATRACO (Rwa)
2-1, 0-0 (agg 2-1)
AS Douanes (Sen) v Ports Authority (SLe)
3-1, 1-0 (agg 4-1)
ASO Chlef (Alg) v Fello Star (Gui)
1-0, 2-1 (agg 3-1)
Canon Yaounde (Cam) v Inter Star (Bdi)
1-1, 1-0 (agg 2-1)
DC Motema Pembe (DRC) v Mangasport (Gab)
1-2, 0-1 (agg 1-3)
Djoliba (Mli) v Casa Sport (Sen)
4-0, 1-0 (agg 5-0)
Etoile Filante (BuF) v Heart of Lions (Gha)
2-0, 2-3 (agg 4-3)
FAR Rabat (Mor) v Sporting Clube (CVI)
6-1, 0-1 (agg 6-2)
Ferroviario (Moz) v Kampala City Council (Uga)
2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3)
Heartland (Nig) v Black Star (Lbr)
4-0, 6-1 (agg 10-1)
Kano Pillars (Nig) v Elect Sport (Chd)
2-0, 0-0 (agg 2-0)
Monomotapa (Zim) v Miembeni (Zan)
2-0, 1-2 (agg 3-2)
Petro Atletico (Ang) v Royal Leopards (Swa)
3-0, 3-0 (agg 6-0)
Primeiro Agosto (Ang) v CARA (Con)
5-2, 2-1 (agg 7-3)
*Stade Tamponnaise (Reu) v Acad. Ny Antsika (Mad)
6-0
SuperSport United (SAf) v Curepipe Starlight (Mts)
3-0, 5-2 (agg 8-2)
Young Africans (Tan) v Etoile d'Or (Com)
8-1, 6-0 (agg 14-1)
Zesco United (Zam) v Mathare United (Ken)
2-0, 3-1 (agg 5-1)

**1st leg cancelled because of violence in Madagascar; tie settled over a single leg*

Club Africain (Tun) v Sporting Clube (GuB) – Sporting Clube withdrew; Club Africain walkover
IZ Khemisset (Mor) v Wallidan (Gam) – Wallidan withdrew; IZ Khemisset walkover

Byes to 1st round: Africa Sports (IvC), Ajax Cape Town (SAf), Al Ahly (Egy; holders), Al Hilal (Sud), Al Ittihad (Lby), Asante Kotoko (Gha), ASEC Abidjan (IvC), Cotonsport (Cam), Etoile Sahel (Tun), JS Kabylie (Alg), TP Mazembe (DRC)

1st round draw

Africa Sports v Zesco United
Ajax Cape Town v Monomotapa
Al Ahly v Young Africans
Al Hilal v Stade Tamponnaise
Al Ittihad v Al Merreikh
AS Douanes v Kano Pillars
Asante Kotoko v IZ Khemisset
ASEC Abidjan v Etoile Filante
Club Africain v Djoliba
Cotonsport v Mangasport
Etoile Sahel v ASO Chlef
Heartland v FAR Rabat
JS Kabylie v Al Ahly Tripoli
Kampala City Council v SuperSport United
Primeiro Agosto v Canon Yaounde
TP Mazembe v Petro Atletico

1st legs - March 13-15; 2nd legs - April 3-5

CONFEDERATION CUP

Preliminary round

1st legs - Jan 31/Feb 1; 2nd legs - Feb 13-15
AS Vacoas Phoenix (Mts) v AS Adema (Mad)
1-1, 1-0 (agg 2-1)
Atletico Muculmano (Moz) v Malanti Chiefs (Swa)
1-0, 1-5 (agg 2-5)
Gor Mahia (Ken) v APR (Rwa)
0-5, 0-1 (agg 0-6)
Hay Al Arab (Sud) v Al Ahly Benghazi (Lby)
0-1, 1-0 (agg 1-1; Al Ahly 3-2 on pens)
Mighty Barrolle (Lbr) v SO Armee (IvC)
0-2, 1-2 (agg 1-4)
OC Bukavu Dawa (DRC) v Club 57 Tourbillon (Con)
3-3, 1-1 (agg 4-4; Club 57 on away goals)
Prisons (Tan) v Khaleej Surt (Lby)
0-2, 0-4 (agg 0-6)
Red Arrows (Zam) v Mundu (Zan)
6-0, 1-0 (agg 7-0)
Sport Bissau e Benfica (GuB) v ASC Yakaar (Sen)
1-2, 0-1 (agg 1-3)
Tourbillon (Chd) v Vital'o (Bdi)
4-0, 0-1 (agg 4-1)
USM (Gab) v AS-FAN (Ngr)
2-1, 0-0 (agg 2-1)
USO (BuF) v ASC Diaraf (Sen)
0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1; USO on away goals)
Victors (Uga) v CAPS United (Zim)
0-2, 0-1 (agg 0-3)

Byes to 1st round: Aigle Royal (Cam), AS Vita Club (DRC), Bayelsa United (Nig), CS Sfaxien (Tun), EGS Gafsa (Tun), ENPPI (Egy), ES Setif (Alg), Haras Hedood (Egy), Jeunesse Club (IvC), JSM Bejaia (Alg), Mamelodi Sundowns (SAf), MAS Fes (Mor), Ocean Boys (Nig), Recreativo (Ang), Santos (Ang), Satellite (Gui), Stade Malien (Mli), Stade Tunisien (Tun), Union Douala (Cam)

1st round draw

1st legs - March 13-15; 2nd legs - April 3-5
APR v Haras Hedood
AS Vacoas Phoenix v Mamelodi Sundowns
ASC Yakaar v JSM Bejaia
CAPS United v ENPPI
Club 57 Tourbillon v Bayelsa United
CS Sfaxien v Al Ahly Benghazi
Khaleej Surt v ES Setif
Malanti Chiefs v AS Vita Club
MAS Fes v EGS Gafsa
Red Arrows v Ocean Boys
Satellite v Jeunesse Club
SO Armee v Recreativo
Stade Tunisien v Stade Malien
Tourbillon v Union Douala
USM v Santos
USO v Aigle Royal

EGYPT

Feb 12: Al Shorta 2 Tersana 1.
Feb 13: Petrojet 3 Al Jaish 1; Ghazl Al Mehalla 0 Itesalata 0; Al Mokawloon 3 Olympic 1.
Feb 14: Assyut Petrol 1 ENPPI 2; Al Ittihad 1 Zamalek 0; Ismaili 2 Haras Hedood 0; Al Ahly 2 Al Masry 1.
Feb 17: Olympic 3 Petrojet 1; Tersana 1 Ghazl Al Mehalla 2.
Feb 18: Itesalata 1 Al Ittihad 2; Al Jaish 1 Ismaili 0; ENPPI 0 Al Shorta 1; Haras Hedood 2 Assyut Petrol 1; Al Masry 1 Zamalek 1; Al Ahly 2 Al Mokawloon 1.
Feb 22: Assyut Petrol 2 Al Jaish 1; Ismaili 1 Olympic 0; Ghazl Al Mehalla 1 ENPPI 1; Al Ittihad 0 Tersana 0; Petrojet 2 Al Ahly 2; Al Shorta 0 Haras Hedood 2.
Feb 23: Al Mokawloon 1 Al Masry 1; Zamalek 1 Itesalata 1.
Feb 26: Haras Hedood 1 Ghazl Al Mehalla 0; ENPPI 3 Al Ittihad 2; Al Jaish 1 Al Shorta 0; Olympic 2 Assyut Petrol 2; Al Ahly 0 Ismaili 1.
Feb 27: Al Mokawloon 0 Petrojet 0; Tersana 0 Zamalek 0; Al Masry 2 Itesalata 1.

EGYPT

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ahly	19	12	4	3	34	16	40
Ismaili	20	12	2	6	30	23	38
ENPPI	20	10	6	4	37	26	36
Petrojet	20	9	9	2	33	25	36
Haras Hedood	20	9	6	5	19	11	33
Al Ittihad	20	7	6	7	20	23	27
Al Masry	20	6	8	6	28	24	26
Al Jaish	20	7	4	9	26	35	25
Zamalek	20	6	6	8	20	19	24
G Al Mehalla	20	6	6	8	15	17	24
Assyut Petrol	20	7	3	10	20	29	24
Al Mokawloon	20	4	11	5	23	24	23
Al Shorta	20	6	5	9	20	23	23
Itesalata	20	4	7	9	28	33	19
Olympic	19	4	5	10	22	35	17
Tersana	20	3	6	11	17	29	15

MOROCCO

MOROCCO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Raja	21	11	8	2	33	13	41
DH	21	11	4	6	22	14	37
Wydad	20	9	8	3	17	5	35
FAR	20	9	6	5	24	13	33
OC Khourigba	21	8	7	6	13	15	31
MAS	21	7	9	5	20	16	30
AS	21	7	8	6	19	21	29
MA	21	6	8	7	18	20	26
KAC	21	5	10	6	20	23	25
HUS	20	6	6	8	19	20	24
KAC	21	6	6	9	18	22	24
IZ	21	4	11	6	15	18	23
OC Safi	21	4	10	7	16	20	22
JSM*	20	6	5	9	18	29	21
MC	21	5	4	12	17	29	19
SCC	21	3	8	10	13	24	17

**2pts deducted*

SOUTH AFRICA

Feb 7: Golden Arrows 0 Mamelodi 1; Santos 0 Orlando 0; SuperSport 1 Thanda 3; Kaizer 1 Moroka 2; Bidvest 1 Platinum 0.
Feb 8: Bloemfontein 2 Ajax 1; Bay 0 Free State 1; AmaZulu 1 Maritzburg 2.
Feb 14: Platinum 2 Bay 0; Free State 1 Santos 0; Ajax 0 AmaZulu 0; Kaizer 2 Bloemfontein 1.
Feb 15: Thanda 2 Golden Arrows 2; Moroka 2 Orlando 1; Mamelodi 2 Bidvest 0.
Feb 18: Bloemfontein 4 Moroka 1; Bidvest 6 Thanda 2.
Feb 20: Santos 1 Platinum 1.
Feb 21: Golden Arrows 5 Maritzburg 2; SuperSport 2 Ajax 0; Orlando 1 Free State 0.
Feb 22: AmaZulu 0 Kaizer 0; Bay 2 Mamelodi 0.
Feb 25: Mamelodi 0 Free State 0; Ajax 4 Bay 1; AmaZulu 2 SuperSport 1; Moroka 0 Santos 1.
Feb 28: Mamelodi 2 Santos 1; Ajax 0 Golden Arrows 1; Kaizer 0 SuperSport 3.
Mar 1: Platinum 1 Orlando 2; Thanda 1 Bay 0; Bloemfontein 0 AmaZulu 2.

SOUTH AFRICA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
SuperSport	23	13	4	6	36	18	43
Mamelodi	23	11	5	7	27	18	38
Orlando	22	10	7	5	23	14	37
Ajax	23	10	5	8	25	25	35
Kaizer	22	10	4	8	28	26	34
Golden Arrows	21	9	6	6	30	20	33
Moroka	21	9	5	7	27	26	32
Bidvest	21	9	4	8	28	26	31
AmaZulu	23	9	4	10	28	28	31
Santos	22	8	7	7	20	22	31
Free State	22	7	8	7	24	22	29
Platinum	21	6	8	7	27	26	26
Thanda	22	8	2	12	33	43	26
Maritzburg	22	6	4	12	24	43	22
Bloemfontein	22	5	6	11	24	29	21
Bay	24	5	5	14	24	42	20

TUNISIA

Feb 14: Hammam-Sousse 0 Jendouba 0.
Feb 15: Olympique 1 Esperance 1; Monastir 1 Etoile Sahel 2; Sfaxien 1 Stade Tunisien 1; Kasserine 0 Marsa 0; Hammam-Lif 1 Gafsa 2; Club Africain 1 Bizertin 0.
Feb 21: Esperance 2 Hammam-Lif 2.
Feb 22: Bizertin 1 Jendouba 1; Olympique 0 Monastir 1; Stade Tunisien 0 Hammam-Sousse 1; Etoile Sahel 3 Kasserine 1; Gafsa 1 Sfaxien 2; Marsa 1 Club Africain 2.

caps for Australia, was in the Adelaide squad that reached the 2008 Asian Champions League Final.

Experience...Costanzo

CHINA

Bridge loan

Striker Mark Bridge has joined Tianjin Teda on a short-term loan from Sydney.

The 23-year-old will be available to play for the Chinese Super League side in this season's Asian Champions League until he returns to Australia in July.

IRAN

Esteghlal held

A late penalty from Persepolis' Maziar Zare ended a run of five straight victories for Esteghlal in one of Asia's biggest derbies as the reigning champions came from behind to draw 1-1.

Mojtaba Jabari put the home side in front after 67 minutes at Tehran's Azadi Stadium. The result keeps Esteghlal one point clear at the top of the table and eight ahead of their arch-rivals.

Opener...Jabari

100,000 attendance at the Esteghlal v Persepolis game in Iran

Feb 27: Sfaxien 1 Marsa 0; Monastir 1 Stade Tunisien 1.
Feb 28: Bizertin 0 Hammam-Lif 0; Hammam-Sousse 0 Etoile Sahel 1; Jendouba 1 Olympique 0.
Mar 1: Kasserine 1 Gafsa 1; Club Africain 3 Esperance 0.

TUNISIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Club Africain	21	13	8	0	32	8	47
Esperance	21	13	6	2	40	20	45
Etoile Sahel	21	12	8	1	35	11	44
Sfaxien	21	9	9	3	26	19	36
Monastir	21	9	4	8	22	22	31
Stade Tunisien	21	7	7	7	25	23	28
Bizertin	21	5	10	6	14	17	25
Ham-Lif	21	6	6	9	22	32	24
Ham-Sousse	21	4	9	8	20	26	21
Olympique	21	5	5	11	12	21	20
Gafsa	21	3	10	8	17	32	19
Jendouba	21	3	9	9	10	23	18
Marsa	21	3	7	11	12	21	16
Kasserine	21	2	8	11	12	24	14

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round

East Asia section

Feb 18: Provincial Electricity Authority (Tha) 1 Singapore Armed Forces (Sin) 4 (aet).

Armed Forces went through to meet PSMS Medan (Ins)

Feb 25: Singapore Armed Forces 2 PSMS Medan 1 (aet).

West Asia section

Feb 25: Al Sharjah (UAE) 3 Dempo (Ind) 0.

Singapore Armed Forces and Al Sharjah entered group stage; all losers (including Provincial Electricity Authority) entered the AFC Cup

Group stage draw

Group A
Al Ahli (UAE)
Al Hilal (Sau)
Pakhtakor (Uzb)
Saba Battery (Irn)

Group B
Al Gharafa (Qat)
Al Shabab (Sau)
Al Sharjah (UAE)
Persepolis (Irn)

Group C
Al Ittihad (Sau)
Al Jazira (UAE)
Esteghlal (Irn)
Umm Salal (Qat)

Group D
Al Ettifaq (Sau)
Al Shabab (UAE)
Bunyodkor (Uzb)
Sepahan (Irn)

Group E
Beijing Guoan (Chn)
Nagoya Grampus (Jap)
Newcastle Jets (Aus)
Ulsan Hyundai (SKo)

Group F
Gamba Osaka (Jap)
Seoul (SKo)
Shandong Luneng (Chn)
Sriwijaya (Ins)

Group G
Kashima Antlers (Jap)
Shanghai Shenhua (Chn)
Singapore Armed Forces (Sin)
Suwon Bluewings (SKo)

Group H
Central Coast Mariners (Aus)
Kawasaki Frontale (Jap)
Pohang Steelers (SKo)
Tianjin Teda (Chn)

Top two in each group qualify for 1st knockout rnd

Group stage matchdays: Mar 10/11, Mar 17/18, Apr 7/8, Apr 21/22, May 5/6, May 19/20

AFC CUP

Draw

Group A
Al Ahed (Leb)
Al Tilal (Yem)
Busaiteen (Bah)
Neftchi (Uzb)

Group B
Al Hilal (Yem)
Al Suwaiq (Oma)
Al Zawra'a (Irq)
Safa (Leb)

Group C
Al Arabi (Kuw)
Al Mabarrah (Leb)
Al Orouba (Oma)
Arbil (Irq)

Group D
Al Karama (Syr)
Al Wihdat (Jor)
Kuwait SC (Kuw)
Mohun Bagan (Ind)

Group E
Al Faisaly (Jor)
Al Majd (Syr)
Dempo (Ind)
Muharraq (Bah)

Group F
Johor (Mly)
PSMS Medan (Ins)
South China (HK)
VB (Mdv)

Group G
Chonburi (Tha)
Eastern Athletic (HK)
Hanoi ACB (Vie)
Kedah (Mly)

Group H
Binh Duong (Vie)
Home United (Sin)
Provincial Electricity Authority (Tha)
Valencia (Mdv)

Top two in each group qualify for 1st knockout rnd

Group stage matchdays: Mar 10, Mar 17, Apr 7, Apr 21, May 5, May 19

AUSTRALIA

CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS

Minor semi-final

1st leg - Feb 6; 2nd leg - Feb 13
Central Coast v Queensland
0-2, 1-2 (agg 1-4)

Major semi-final

1st leg - Feb 7; 2nd leg - Feb 14
Adelaide v Melbourne
0-2, 0-4 (agg 0-6)

Preliminary final

Feb 21: Adelaide 1 Queensland 0 (single tie).

Grand Final

Feb 28 - Melbourne
Melbourne 1 (Pondeljak 60)
Adelaide 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 53,273. **Ref:** Breeze
Sent off: Cristiano (Adelaide) 10min; Allsopp (Melbourne) 65min

IRAN

Feb 12: Bargh 1 Moghavemat 2; Peykan 2 Payam 0; Malavan 2 Pas 1; Esteghlal Ahvaz 0 Foolad 1.
Feb 13: AbooMoslem 1 Mes 1; Saba 2 Damash 2; Saipa 1 Zob-Ahan 0; Sepahan 2 Rah-Ahan 0; Esteghlal Tehran 1 Persepolis 1.
Feb 17: Sepahan 1 Bargh 0; Persepolis 1 AbooMoslem 0.
Feb 18: Esteghlal Ahvaz 1 Saba 1; Rah-Ahan 0 Zob-Ahan 1; Damash 1 Peykan 0; Pas 2 Saipa 1; Mes 3 Foolad 2; Payam 2 Malavan 0; Moghavemat 4 Esteghlal Tehran 1.
Feb 21: Bargh 1 Persepolis 1.
Feb 22: AbooMoslem 1 Payam 1; Foolad 3 Damash 0; Malavan 1 Esteghlal Ahvaz 0; Peykan 0 Sepahan 1; Saba 1 Rah-Ahan 1; Saipa 1 Mes 1; Zob-Ahan 3 Moghavemat 1; Esteghlal Tehran 1 Pas 0.
Feb 27: Esteghlal Ahvaz 0 Zob-Ahan 2; Moghavemat 0 Saipa 0; Pas 0 Foolad 0; Payam 1 Mes 2; Damash 1 AbooMoslem 0; Rah-Ahan 3 Bargh 0; Saba 3 Malavan 0; Sepahan 0 Persepolis 0.
Feb 28: Peykan 1 Esteghlal Tehran 1.

IRAN	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Esteghlal T	29	17	6	6	64	32	57
Zob-Ahan	29	16	8	5	49	36	56
Persepolis	29	13	10	6	44	34	49
Sepahan	29	12	12	5	40	29	48
Mes	29	12	10	7	43	34	46
Saba	29	10	15	4	40	29	45
Foolad	29	11	9	9	42	36	42
Peykan	29	11	8	10	39	34	41
Saipa	29	10	10	9	38	40	40
Moghavemat	29	10	10	9	31	33	40
Rah-Ahan	29	10	7	12	32	35	37
Malavan	29	8	11	10	29	36	35
Pas	29	8	8	13	31	42	32
AbooMoslem	29	8	7	14	32	38	31
Esteghlal A	29	7	7	15	27	45	28
Damash	29	5	10	14	32	49	25
Bargh	28	5	8	15	31	42	23
Payam	28	5	8	15	27	47	23

SAUDI ARABIA

SAUDI ARABIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Hilal	18	13	4	1	36	6	43
Al Ittihad	18	13	4	1	45	18	43
Al Shabab	18	9	3	6	31	23	30
Al Ittifaq	17	7	6	4	22	13	27
Al Ahly	15	7	4	4	21	13	25
Al Nasr	15	7	3	5	15	14	24
Al Wahda	15	5	5	5	23	24	20
Al Hazm	17	4	5	8	21	28	17
Najran	17	4	3	10	16	34	15
Al Raed	16	4	0	12	15	31	12
Abha	16	2	4	10	14	36	10
Al Watani	16	2	3	11	17	36	9

OCEANIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Feb 14: Auckland City (NZ) 8 Port Vila Sharks (Van) 1.

GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Auckland	3	2	1	0	12	3	7
Waitakere (NZ)	2	1	1	0	5	2	4
Port Vila	3	0	0	3	1	13	0

Group B

Feb 14: Ba (Fij) 1 Hekari Souths (PNG) 3.

GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Koloale (Sol)	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Ba	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Hekari Souths	3	1	0	2	5	6	3

Group winners qualify for Final

Remaining matchdays: Mar 7, Mar 28

NEW ZEALAND

Feb 6: Waitakere 3 Otago 0; Hawke's Bay 0 Auckland 1.
Feb 8: Waikato 2 Waitakere 1; Canterbury 0 Hawke's Bay 4; Otago 2 Wellington 4; Auckland 3 Young Heart 0.
Feb 14: Young Heart 1 Waikato 0.
Feb 15: Hawke's Bay 0 Waitakere 1.
Feb 21: Young Heart 0 Auckland 0.
Feb 22: Otago 2 Waitakere 3; Wellington 3 Canterbury 1.
Mar 1: Auckland 5 Canterbury 0; Young Heart 2 Waitakere 2; Hawke's Bay 2 Otago 0; Wellington 4 Waikato 1.

NEW ZEALAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Waitakere	14	10	3	1	30	12	33
Auckland	14	8	1	5	27	15	25
Young Heart	14	7	2	5	22	19	23
Wellington	14	7	2	5	28	28	23
Hawke's Bay	14	7	1	6	24	17	22
Waikato	14	6	1	7	19	22	19
Otago	14	2	2	10	16	32	8
Canterbury	14	2	2	10	11	32	8

Famous Last Words

Who said what and why

"With such a player as captain you'll never be champions"

Hertha Berlin's Ukraine striker Andriy Voronin is not impressed with Bayern's Mark Van Bommel

"When Voronin has won as many titles as me, then I'll congratulate him"

Van Bommel's riposte is as brusque as one of his challenges

"The excitement for this tournament isn't as much as we expected"
Ivorian football federation president Jacques Anouma bemoans the half-hearted public response to the inaugural African Nations Championship, which is reserved for players from local domestic leagues

"To have attendances in the Second Division of nearly 30,000 is exceptional, especially when you know they aren't sons of Rothschild in the stands"
Lens' Moroccan defender Alaeddine Yahia reveals his amazement at the northern French club's loyal supporters

Never a dull moment...Mourinho

"Messy"
Julia, girlfriend of new Arsenal recruit Andrei Arshavin, gets off on the wrong foot in London with her description of local females

"I shouldn't have done it. I never thought it would snowball like it has"
Gregory Delwarte, reserve keeper at Belgian side Mons, is fined for criticising his coach on Facebook

Full bodied chorus...Lens fans have impressed defender Alaeddine Yahia

"Robinho would have done us good. My team wasn't Brazilian enough. It's a bureaucratic team"
A few days before his Chelsea dismissal, Luiz Felipe Scolari bemoans his side's lack of flair

"Amauri? No thanks. Italy are world champions, not Azerbaijan or Finland"
Azzurri enforcer Rino Gattuso comes out against the naturalisation of Juventus' Brazilian striker, igniting a diplomatic skirmish with the Finns

"I'll be there in the shadows, without contract, pay or official title"
Poland coach Leo Beenhakker controversially takes up a part-time position as technical advisor with struggling Feyenoord

"Do I feel Belgian? I don't know the name of the current prime minister"
Brazil-born Igor De Camargo before making his international debut for Belgium

"If you are asking me if I think I will return to Chelsea I will tell you: 'Yes, I think so'"
Jose Mourinho just can't resist it

"Reyes is too often on the front pages of the papers. On the pitch his performances have been lousy"
Benfica boss Quique Flores slams inconsistent winger Jose Antonio Reyes. He later backtracks and calls the Spaniard "electric"

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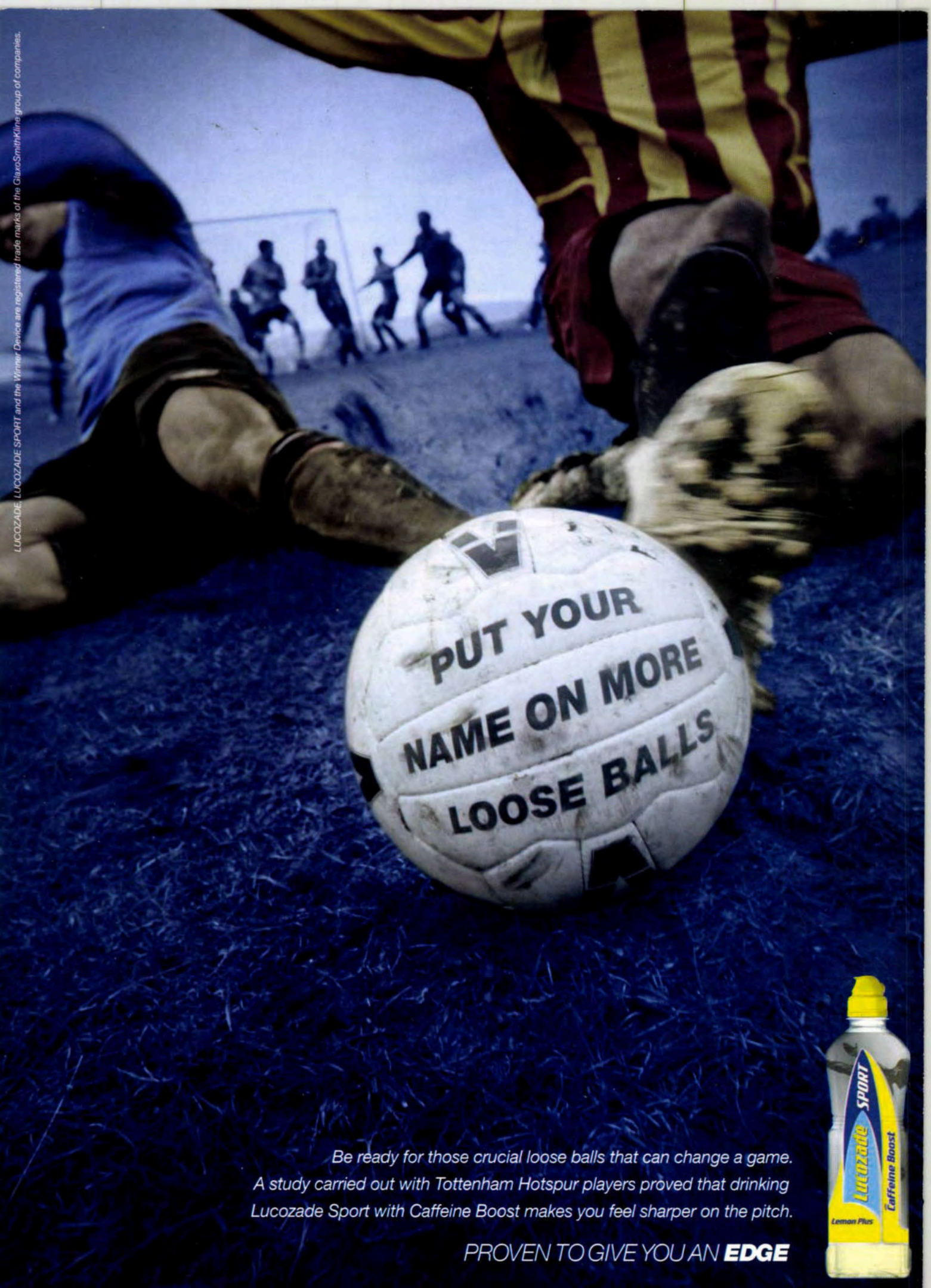
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